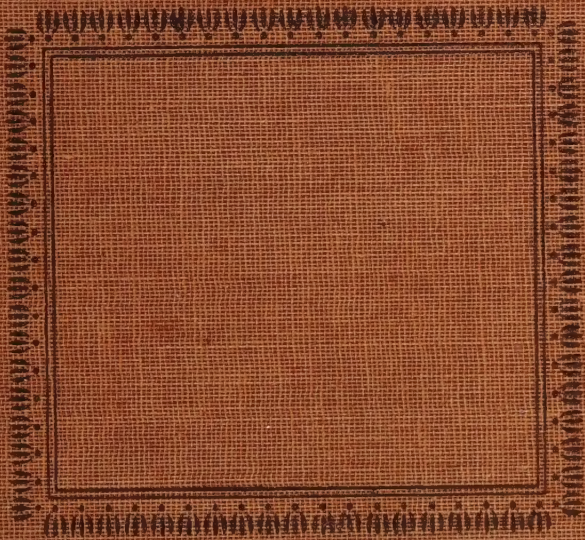

Dec. 25. 1943.

To.

Carl Burton Carnahan.

Merry Christmas

From

Helen Leonard

THE MINE WITH THE IRON DOOR

HAROLD BELL WRIGHT

The Mine With the Iron Door

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TO

MY FRIENDS

IN THE OLD PUEBLO

TUCSON

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THE MINE WITH THE IRON DOOR

THE MINE WITH THE IRON DOOR

CHAPTER I

THE CAÑON OF GOLD

And yet—those who look for it still find "color" in the Cañada del Oro. Romance and adventure still live in the Cañon of Gold. The treasures of life are not all hidden in a lost mine behind an iron door.

FROM every street and corner in Tucson we see the mountains. From our places of business, from our railway depots and hotels, from our University campus and halls, and from the windows and porches of our homes we look up to the mighty hills.

But of all the peaks and ranges that keep their sentinel posts around this old pueblo there are none so bold in the outlines of their granite heights and rugged cañons, so exquisitely beautiful in their soft colors of red and blue and purple, or so luring in the call of their remote and hidden fastnesses, as the Santa Catalinas.

Every morning they are there—looking down upon our little city in the desert with a brooding, Godlike tolerance—remote yet very near. All day

long they watch with world-old patience our fretful activities, our puny strivings and our foolish pretenses. And when evening is come and the dusk of our desert basin deepens, their castle crags and turret peaks signal, with the red fire of the sunset, "good-night" to us who dwell in the gloom below. Even in the darkness we see their shadowy might against the sky, and feel the still and solemn mystery of their enduring strength under the desert stars.

This is a story of some people who lived in the Catalinas.

If you would find more exactly the scenes of this romance you must take the new Bankhead Highway that, in its course from Tucson to Florence and Phœnix, runs for miles in the shadow of these mountains. From the old Mexican quarter of the city—picturesque still with the colorful life of the West that is vanishing—you go straight north on Main Street, where the dust of your passing is the dust of the crumbled adobe buildings and fortifications of the ancient pueblo that had its beginning somewhere in the forgotten centuries. Leaving the outskirts of the town your way leads over rolling lands of greasewood and cacti, down the long grade past the cemetery, past the Government hospital in the valley, to the bridge that spans the Rillito. From the little river you climb quickly up to the desert slopes that form the western base of the main range and that lie under their wide skies unmarked by human hands since the beginning of deserts and mountains. Beyond the famous Steam

Pump Ranch, some sixteen miles from Tucson, the road to Oracle branches off from the Bankhead Highway and climbs higher and higher until from a wide mesa you can see the place of my story—the mighty Cañada del Oro—the Cañon of Gold.

But if you know the way you may turn aside from the main road before you come to this new Oracle branch and take instead the old road that winds closer to the mountains and for several miles follows the bed of the lower cañon. It was along this ancient trail that the eventful and romantic life of this southern Arizona country, through its many ages, moved.

This way, centuries ago, came the Spaniards—lured by tales of a strange people who used silver and gold as we use tin and iron, and who set turquoise in the gates of their houses. This way came the Franciscan Fathers to find in the Cañada del Oro gold for their mission at San Xavier. This way, from the San Pedro and the Aravaipa, came savage Apache to raid the peaceful farming Papagos and later to war against the pale-face settlers in the valley of the Santa Cruz. Prehistoric races, explorers, Indians, priests, pioneers, prospectors, cattlemen, soldiers and adventurers of every sort from every land—all, all have come this way—along this old road through the Cañon of Gold.

And because there was water here, and because there was gold here, this wild and adventurous life, through the passing centuries, made this place a camping ground and a battle field—a place of labor

and crime, of victory and defeat; of splendid heroism, noble sacrifice, and dreadful fear. Set amid the grandeur and the beauty of these vast deserts, lonely skies and wild and rugged mountains, the Cañada del Oro has been, most of all, as indeed it is to-day, a place of dreams that never came true; of hopes that were never fulfilled; of labor that was vain.

Of all the stirring tales of this picturesque region of the Santa Catalinas, of all the romantic legends and traditions that have come down to us from its shadowy past, none is more filled with the essence of human life and love and hopes and dreams than is the tale of the Mine with the Iron Door.

But this is not a story of those old Spaniards and padres and Indians and pioneers. It is a story of to-day.

The old, old tale of the Mine with the Iron Door is as true for us as it ever was for those who lived and loved so many years ago. We too, in these days, have our dreams that must remain always, merely dreams and nothing more. We too, in these modern times, are called upon to bury in the secret places of our modern hearts hopes that are dead. In every life there are the ashes of fires that have burned out or, by some cold fate, have been extinguished. For every living one of us, I believe, there is a Cañada del Oro—a Cañon of Gold—there is a lost mine that will never be found—there are iron doors that may never be opened.

And yet—those who look for it still find "color"

in the Cañada del Oro. Romance and adventure still live in the Cañon of Gold. The treasures of life are not all hidden in a lost mine behind an iron door.

As the old prospector, Thad Grove, said to his pardner one time when their last pinch of dust was gone and their most promising lead had pinched out: "After all, it's a dead immortal cinch that if we *had* a-happened to strike it rich like we was hopin', we couldn't never bin as rich as we was hopin' to be. There jest naterally *ain't* that much gold, nohow."

"Sure," returned Bob Hill, the other old-timer, "and ain't you never took notice how much richer a feller with one poor, little, old nugget in his pan is than the hombre what only thinks he's got a bonanza somewheres on the insides of a mountain? An' look at this, will you: If everybody was to certain sure *find* the mine he's huntin' there'd be so blame *much* gold in the world that it'd take a hundred-mule train to pack enough to buy a mess of frijoles. It's a good thing, *I* say, that somebody, er something has fixed it somehow so's *all* our fool dreams *can't* come true."

"Speakin' of love," said Thad on another occasion, when the two were discussing the happiness that had so strangely come to them with their partnership daughter, "love ain't no big deposit that a feller is allus hopin' to find but mostly never does. Love is jest a medium high-grade ore that you got to dig for."

"Yep," agreed Bob, "an' when you've got your ore you've sure got to run it through the mill an' treat it scientific if you expect to recover much of the values."

The affairs of the old Pardners and their daughter Marta were matters of great and never-failing interest to the loungers who gathered in front of the general store and post-office in Oracle.

Bill Janson, known as the Lizard, invariably opened and led the discussions. The Janson family, it should be said, had drifted into the Cañada del Oro from Arkansas. They were, in the picturesque vernacular of the cattlemen, "nesters." The Lizard, an only son, was one of those rat-faced, shifty-eyed, loose-mouthed, male creatures who know everything about everybody and spend the major part of their days telling it.

It was on one of those social occasions when the Lizard was entertaining a group of idlers on the platform in front of the store that I first heard of the two old prospectors and their partnership girl.

CHAPTER II

AT THE ORACLE STORE

"My Gawd! Hit's enough t' drive a decent man plumb loony, a-tryin' t' figger hit out."

"YES, sir," said the Lizard, "I'm a-tellin' ye that them thar Pardners an' their gal—Marta her name is—are th' beatenest outfit ye er ary other man ever seed. Ain't nobody kin figger 'em out, nohow. They've been here nigh about five year, too. Me an' paw an' maw, we been here eight year ourselves—comin' this fall. Yes, sir, they're sure a queer actin' lot."

The Lizard had so evidently made his introductory remarks for my benefit that some sort of acknowledgment was unquestionably due.

"What are they, miners?"

"Uh-huh, they're a-workin' a claim—makin' enough t' live on, I reckon—leastways they're a-livin'. But that ain't hit—hit's that thar gal of theirn." He shook his head and heaved a troubled sigh. "Law, law!"

And no one could have failed to mark the eager viciousness of the Lizard's expression as the loose-mouthed creature ruminated on the delectable gossip he was about to offer.

"Ye see hit's like this: Them two old-timers had

this here gal with 'em when they first come into th' cañon down yonder. She was a kid—'long 'bout fourteen, then. An' there ain't nobody kin tell fer sure who she is, ner whar she come from. They say as how old Bob an' Thad found her when they was a-prospectin' onct down on th' border somewhares —tuck her away from some Mexican outfit er other. Mebby hit's so an' mebby hit ain't. But everybody 'lows as how she ain't come from no good sort nohow, 'cause if she had why wouldn't the Pardners tell hit? An' take an' look at this dad-beatin' father arrangement—take their names fer instance: one is Bob Hill, t'other is Thad Grove, an' what's the gal's name but Marta Hillgrove—Hill–Grove—d'ye ketch hit? An' one week old Bob he'll be her pappy, an' th' next week old Thad he's her paw, an' the gal she jist naterally 'lows they both her daddies. My Gawd! Hit's enough t' drive a decent man plumb loony a-tryin' t' figger hit out."

The Lizard's friends laughed.

"Oh, ye kin laugh, but I'm a-tellin' ye thar's somethin' wrong somewhars an' I ain't th' only one what says so neither. Won't nobody over here in Oracle have nothin' t' do with her. Will they?" He turned to the loungers for confirmation.

"She's a plumb beauty, too, an' a mighty cute little piece—reg'lar spitfire, if ye git her started—an' smart—say, she bosses them pore old Pardners till they're scared mighty nigh t' death of her—an' proud—huh—she's too all-fired proud to suit some of us."

The crowd grinned.

"The Lizard, he sure ought to know," said one.

"How about it, Lizard?" came from another. "You been a-tryin' t' make up t' her ever since she moved into your neighborhood, ain't you?"

"Ye all don't need to mind about me," retorted the Lizard, with a vicious leer. "My day'll happen along yet. Ye notice I ain't drawed what Chuck Billings got."

"Chuck Billings," he continued for the benefit of any one who might not be well versed in Cañada del Oro history, "he was one of George Wheeler's punchers, an' he tuck up with her one evenin' when she was a-comin' home from Saint Jimmy's, an' I'll be dad-burned if her old prospectin' daddies didn't work on Chuck 'til George jist naterally had t' send him int' th' hospital at Tucson. Chuck he ain't never showed up in this neighborhood since neither. I heard as how George told him if he did get well an' dast t' come back he'd take a try at him hisself."

"Good for George!"

"Heh? What's that?"

"Does George Wheeler live in the Cañada del Oro, too?"

"Naw, Wheeler he's got a big cow ranch jist back here from Oracle a piece. George he rides all th' cañon country though—him an' his punchers. An' us folks down in th' cañon we go through his hoss pasture when we come up here t' Oracle fer anythin'. George an' his wife they're 'bout th' only

folks what'll have any truck with that pardnership gal. But shucks, George an' his wife they'd be good t' anybody. Take Saint Jimmy an' his maw now, they have her 'round of course."

"Saint Jimmy is your minister, I suppose?"

"He's what?"

"A minister—clergyman, you know—a preacher."

"Oh, ye mean a parson— Shucks! Naw, Saint Jimmy he's jist one of these here fellers what's everybody's friend. He lives with his maw up on th' mountain 'bove Juniper Spring, 'bout three mile from Wheeler's ranch, jist off th' cañon trail after ye come up into th' hills. A little white house hit is. You kin see hit easy from most anywheres. His real name's Burton. He's a doctor, er was 'fore he got t' be a lunger. He was a-livin' back East when he tuk sick. Then him an' his maw they come t' this country. He's well enough here, 'pears like; but they do say he dassn't never leave Arizona an' go back t' his doctorin' agin like he was. He's a funny cuss—plays th' flute t' beat anythin'. You kin hear him 'most any time of a pretty evenin'. He'll roost up on some rock on th' side of th' mountain somewhares an' toot away 'til plumb midnight; but he won't never play when ye ask him, ner fer any of th' dances we have over here in Oracle neither. I heard George Wheeler say onct as how Saint Jimmy war right smart of a doctor back t' his home whar he come from. You see, Saint Jimmy he's been a-teachin' this here gal of th' Pardners book larnin'."

The Lizard opened his wide mouth in a laugh which showed every yellow tooth in his head. "I'll say he's a-teachin' her. I've seed 'em together up on th' mountains an' in th' cañon more'n onct—book larnin'—huh! Ye don't need t' take my word fer hit neither—ye kin ask anybody 'bout what decent folks thinks of Marta Hillgrove. She——"

How much more the Lizard would have said on his favorite topic will never be known for at that moment a man appeared in the open doorway of the store.

Not one of the group of loungers spoke, but every eye was turned on the man who stood looking them over with such cool contempt.

He was dressed in the ordinary garb of civilization, but his dark, impassive countenance, with the raven-black hair and eyes, was not to be mistaken. The man was an Indian.

Presently, without a word, the red man stepped past the loungers and walked away up the road.

Silently they watched until the Indian was out of sight.

The Lizard drew a long breath.

"That thar's Natachee. He's Injun. Lives all alone somewheres in th' mountains, away up at th' head of th' Cañada del Oro. He's one of them thar school Injuns. Talks like a reglar book when he wants t', but mostly he won't say nothin' t' nobody. Wears white clothes all right, like ye see, when he has t' come t' town fer anythin'; but out in th' mountains he goes 'round jist like all th' Injuns used to. Which goes t' show, I claim, that

an Injun's an Injun no matter how much ye try t' larn him."

"That's right," agreed one of the listeners.

"He's a real sociable cuss, ain't he?" commented another with a grin.

"Him an' Saint Jimmy's friendly enough," said the Lizard, "an' I know th' old Pardners claim he ain't no harm. But I ain't havin' no truck with him myself. This here's a white man's country, I say."

A chorus of "You bet!" "That's what!" and "You're a-shoutin'!" approved the Lizard's sentiments.

Then another voice said:

"Do you reckon this here Natachee really knows anything about that old lost mine in the cañon, like some folks seem to think?"

The Lizard wagged his head in solemn and portentous silence, signifying that, however ready he might be to talk about the Pardners' girl, the Mine with the Iron Door was not a subject to be lightly discussed in the presence of a stranger.

CHAPTER III

THE PARDNERS' GIRL

"Marta is bound to know, when she stops to think about it, that she jest can't have two fathers."

THE house in the Cañon of Gold where the Pardners and their girl lived was little more than a cabin of rough, unpainted boards. But there was a wide porch overrun with vines, and a vegetable garden with flowers. Beyond the garden there was a rude barn or shelter, built as the Indians build, of sahuaro poles and mud, with a small corra made of thorny ocotillo, and the place as a whole was roughly inclosed by an old fence of mesquite posts and barbed wire. On every side the mountains rose—ridge and dome and peak—into the sky, and night and day, through summer droughts and winter rains, the cañon creek murmured or sang or roared on its way from the woodsy heart of the Catalinas to lose itself in the sandy wastes of the desert below. The little mine where the Pardners worked was across the creek a hundred yards or more from the kitchen door.

It was that time of the year when, if the rain gods of the Indians have been kind, the deserts and mountains of Arizona riot in a blaze of color. On the mountain sides, silvery white Apache plumes

and graceful wands of brilliant scarlet mallow were nodding amid the lilac of the loco-weed, while, in every glade and damp depression, the gold of the buck-bean shone in settings of brightest green. And on the cañon floor, the pink white bloom of cañon anemone, with yellow primroses and whispering bells, made points and patches of light in the shadow of the rocky walls.

It is not enough to say that the Pardners' girl fully justified the Lizard's somewhat qualified admiration. There was something more—something that neither the Lizard nor his kind could appreciate. She was rather boyish, perhaps, as girls reared in the healthful out-of-door atmosphere are apt to be, but it was a dainty boyishness—if sturdy—that in no way marred the exquisite feminine qualities of her beauty. Her hair and eyes were dark, and her cheeks richly colored with good health and sunshine; and she looked at one with a disconcerting combination of innocence and frankness which, together with the charm of her sex, was certain to fix the attention of any mere male, whatever his station in life or previous condition of servitude. In short, the strangeness of Marta Hillgrove's relationship to the grizzled old Pardners, with the mystery of her real parentage, was not at all needed to make her the talk of the country side. She was the kind of a girl that both men and women instinctively discuss, though for quite different reasons.

Bob Hill put his empty coffee cup down that Saturday morning with a long breath of satisfaction,

and felt for the pipe and the sack of tobacco in his shirt pocket.

"Thar's nothin' to it, daughter," he remarked—his faded blue eyes twinkling and his leathery, wrinkled, old face beaming with pride and love—"if Mother Burton learns you any more cookin', Thad an' me will founder ourselves sure. I'm here to maintain that one whiff of a breakfast like that would make one of them Egypt mummies claw himself right out of his pyramid."

Thad Grove grunted a scornful, pessimistic, protesting grunt and rubbed the top of his totally bald head with aggressive vigor.

"She ain't your daughter, Bob Hill—not this week. It's my turn to be daddy an' you know it. You're allus a-tryin' to gouge me out of my rights."

Marta's laughter was as unaffected as the song of the cardinal that at that moment was waking the cañon echoes. Patting Thad's arm affectionately, she said:

"Make him play fair, daddy, make him play fair. I'll back you up every time he tries to cheat."

"By smoke!" ejaculated Bob. "I clean disremembered what day it was to-day. But to-morrer is another week an' she'll be mine all right then." He glared at Thad triumphantly. "I tell you, Pardner, jest a-thinkin' of me goin' to be daddy to a gal like her makes me all set up. I've sure got a feelin' that to-morrer is the day we'll dig clean through to our bonanza."

"Huh," retorted Thad. "I got a feelin' we ain't

goin' to dig into no bonanza to-morrer, nor nothin' else."

"Why not?" demanded Bob.

"'Cause to-morrer is Sunday, ain't it? Holy Cats! but you're a-gettin' loonier and loonier. If you keep on a-dyin' at the top you won't be fit to be daddy to nobody. I'll jest up an' git myself ap-p'inted guardian for my off weeks—that's what I'll do."

"I may be a-dyin' at the top," returned Bob, "but, by smoke, I ain't coverin' no alkali flat under my hat like you be. As for us workin' Sundays—I know we ain't allowed, in general, but it's a plumb sin if we can't—jest for to-morrer—with me all set like I am."

He looked at Marta appealingly.

"Whatever my gal says goes," said Thad.

Bob continued persuasively:

"You see, honey, I've got it all figgered out that when we git in about three feet further than we'll make to-day we're bound to uncover our everlastin' fortunes. You want us all to be rich, don't you?"

"It's no use," said the girl firmly. "You both know well enough that I will not permit you to break the Sabbath. Saint Jimmy's mother says it is no way for Christians to do, and that settles it. Anything that Mother Burton says is wrong *is* wrong. You both consider yourselves Christians, don't you?"

"You're dead right, daughter," said Thad, with an air of gentle complacency. "I hadn't a mite of

a notion to work on Sunday myself. I wouldn't go so far as to say I was much of a Christian but"—he glared at his pardner—"it's a cinch I'm no Zulu. As for anybody that intimates we got a chance to uncover a fortune anywhere in that hole out there, between the dump and China—wal, I'd hate to tell you what sort of a Christian I think *he* is."

Bob grinned cheerfully.

"Mebby I ain't so much of a Christian neither," he agreed, "but if I'd a-been that old Pharaoh what built them pyramids——"

The girl interrupted:

"Now, there you go again. That's the second time. What in the world started you to talking about Egypt and pyramids and Pharaoh and mummies and things like that?"

"Oh, I jest happened to take a peek into one of them books that Saint Jimmy got us to buy for you, that's all," returned the old-timer, with a sly wink at the smiling girl. "An' anyway, it seems like I ought to know somethin' about mummies by this time, after livin' as long as I have with that there." He pointed a long, gnarled finger at his pardner. "Egypt or Arizona, livin' or dead, it's all the same, I reckon. A mummy's a mummy wherever you find it."

Thad rubbed his bald head with deliberate care.

"Daughter, does Mother Burton's brand of Christianity say anything about what a man should do to his enemies?"

"Indeed it does," returned the girl. "It says we must love our enemies and forgive them."

"All right—all right—an' what does it say about lovin' an' forgivin' your friends, heh?"

"Why—nothing, I guess."

"Course it don't," cried the old prospector in shrill triumph.

"Course it don't. An' do you know why? I'll tell you why. It's because it's so doggone easy to forgive an enemy compared to what it is to forgive a friend, that's why. The Good Book knows 'tain't necessary to say nothin' about friends, 'cause it's jest as nateral and virtuous to hate a friend as 'tis to love an enemy—that's what I'm a-meanin'."

Marta was not in the least disturbed over this exchange of courtesies by her two fathers. Rising from the table, she laughingly remarked that if they were not *too* busy they might saddle her horse, as she must go to Oracle for supplies. Whereupon the Pardners went to the barn, leaving their girl free to clear away the breakfast things, wash the dishes, and finish her morning housework.

It was an unwritten law of the partnership that the particular father of the week should stand obligated to the parental responsibilities of the position. It was by no means the least of his duties that he must endure the criticisms of the other upon the way he was "bringing up" his daughter. It seems scarcely necessary to add that criticism was never wanting and that it was never without directness and point. To compensate for this burden of re-

sponsibility, the parent was permitted to say "my gal" while the critic, by the rules of the game, must invariably say "that gal of yourn."

While Thad the father was currying his daughter's horse, Nugget—a bright little pinto—Bob squatted comfortably on his heels, his back against the wall of the barn.

"Pardner," he said, as one who speaks after mature deliberation, "I ain't meanin' to mix none in your family affairs, but as a friend I'm a-feelin' constrained to remark that you ain't doin' right by that gal of yourn nohow."

Marta's father was making a careful examination of the pinto's off forefoot and seemed not to hear.

Bob continued:

"Anybody can see that she comes mighty nigh bein' grown up. First thing *you* know somebody'll make her understand all to once that she's a woman, and then——"

Thad dropped the pinto's foot and glared at his pardner over the horse's back.

"Then *what?*"

"Then she'll be wantin' to know things. An'—it might be too late to tell her."

"You mean that I ought to tell my gal what we know about her?" demanded Marta's father. "Is that what you're tryin' to say?"

"You guessed it, Pardner," returned the critical one cheerfully. "It's time that your gal knowed about herself. Bein' her daddy, it's up to you to tell her."

The other exploded:

"Which is exactly what I tried all last week to tell *you*, when you was her daddy, you blamed old numskull, an' you wouldn't near listen to me. A healthy father you are. When it's *your* daughter that ought to be told, you can't even whisper, but when she's mine you can yell your fool head off tellin' me what *I* ought to do. Besides, you said yourself that we don't actually know enough to tell her anything."

"But that was last week, you see," returned Bob calmly. "You was doin' the talkin' then—now *I'm* tellin' you."

When Thad, without replying, fell to rubbing Nugget's glossy hide with such energy that the little horse squirmed like a schoolboy undergoing maternal inspection, Bob continued:

"Marta is bound to know, when she stops to think about it, that she jest can't have two fathers. It's plumb unnateral, even for two such daddies as she's got. So far she ain't give it much thought. She's sort of growed up with the idea an' accepted things as young folks do—up to a certain time, that is. My point is, that from now on her time is liable to come any day. Right now, if she thinks of it at all she jest smiles an' plays the game with us, but that's 'cause she's mostly kid yet. You wait 'til the woman in her is woke up—right there she'll quit playin' an' somethin' is due to happen. You ain't doin' right by your daughter, Thad, not to tell her—you sure ain't."

Thad Grove faced his old pardner miserably. "I know you're right, Bob. Marta ought to be told what we know about her. I can see that it'll look mighty bad to her some day if she ain't. But, hang darn it, it's jest like you said last week—we don't know enough for me to tell her anything. If I was to tell her what little we do know, it would look a heap sight worse to her than it possibly can with her not bein' told anything, like she is now. The way I figger, if the gal don't know nothin', she's got a chance to ride over it; but if she knows the little that we know she'll be plumb ruined."

"I don't reckon it's near so bad as that, Pardner," said the other soothingly. "I'm here to tell you that there ain't nothin' could ruin that gal of yourn."

At this, the fire of old Thad's soul flared up anew.

"Is that so?" he returned in a voice of withering scorn. "*Is* that so? Well, I'm a tellin' *you* that you can ruin *anybody*."

"Saint Jimmy, for instance?" retorted Bob with sarcasm.

"Yes, Saint Jimmy. You can't tell what sort of a scoundrel Saint Jimmy would a-been if he hadn't happened to a-turned sick. There's many a man in the pen, right now, jest on account of havin' too much good health."

"I reckon you're speakin' gospel for once," agreed Bob reluctantly. Then, as if he had not forgotten his critical privileges, he added: "But there's some-

thing else you ought to tell your gal—something that the best authorities all agree ought to be told every gal by somebody—an' bein' as you're her father, an' she ain't never had no real ma, why—it would look like it was up to you."

"What's that?" demanded Thad suspiciously.

"That's what they call love," returned the other gently. "Growin' up like Marta has, with jest us two old, dried-up, desert rats, she don't know no more about love an' its consequences than—than—nothin'."

Marta's father dropped his brush and kicked it viciously across the stable. Nugget danced with excitement.

"Love! Holy Cats! What fool notion'll take you next? You don't need to worry none. Some feller will happen along some day an' tell her more about love in a minute than you've ever knowed in all your life."

"That's jest it," returned the other. "Some feller is bound to tell her, jest like you say. He'll slip up on her quiet like, when she ain't suspicionin' nothin', an' break it to her sudden 'fore she knows where she's at. That's how them consequences happen. An' that's why she ought to know beforehand, so's she can be watchin' out."

Thad was rubbing his bald head seeking, apparently, for an answer sufficiently crushing, when a clear call came from the house.

"Daddy— Oh, Daddy, I am ready."

With frantic haste, the Pardners, working to-

gether as if they had never had a difference, saddled and bridled the pinto. Together they led the little horse to the house.

When the girl was in the saddle, she looked down into their upturned faces with such an expression of girlish affection and womanly thoughtfulness that the two old men grinned with sheepish delight and pride.

"You will find your dinner all ready for you," she said, while Nugget tossed his head, impatient to be off. "It is on the table, covered with a cloth. I'll be home in time for supper. *Adios.*" She lifted the bridle rein and the pinto loped away.

The Pardners stood watching while she opened and closed the gate, cowboy fashion, without dismounting. With a wave of her hand she rode on up the cañon while the two old men followed her with their eyes until she passed from sight around a turn in the cañon wall.

Thad spoke slowly:

"You're plumb right, Bob. The gal has mighty nigh growed into a woman, ain't she? It don't seem more'n a month or two neither, does it?"

"It sure don't," returned the other softly. "An' ain't she a wonder, Thad—ain't she jest a nateral-born wonder?"

"She's all of that," agreed Thad, "an' then some. It plumb scares me though, when I think of her findin' out about herself an' her all educated up by Saint Jimmy an' his mother like she is. Holy Cats, Bob! What'll we do?"

"She's bound to know some day," said Bob.

"She's bound to, sure," echoed Thad with a groan. "But my God a'mighty ain't either of us got nerve to tell her *now*. If she hadn't been goin' to school to Saint Jimmy these last five years—I mean if she was like she would a-been with jest me an' you to bring her up, it might not a-mattered. But now—now it's goin' to be plain hell for her when she finds out."

Bob murmured softly:

"Won't even let us work on Sundays 'cause it ain't the right way for Christians like us to do. We'd ought to a-told long ago, that's what we ought to a-done."

"Sure, we ought to told her," cried Thad, "jest like we'd ought to done a lot of things we ain't. But mournin' over what ought to been done ain't payin' us nothin'. What're we *goin'* to do, that's what we got to figger out. The gal's got to be told."

"Yes," returned Bob. "An' she's got to be told 'fore some sneakin' varmint beats us to it an' tells her for true what me an' you are only suspicionin'. How'll you ever do it?"

"How'll *I* ever do it?" shrilled Thad. "Holy Cats! I can't— How'll you ever do it yourself?"

Bob answered helplessly:

"I can't neither—an' by smoke, I won't."

"She's got to be told," insisted Thad.

"She sure has," said Bob.

CHAPTER IV

SAINT JIMMY

Wise Mother Burton came to wonder, sometimes, if Saint Jimmy's teaching was not more a matter of love than even he perhaps realized.

DOCTOR JIMMY BURTON and his mother spent their first year in Arizona at Tucson and Oracle. But when they were satisfied that Jimmy could live if he gave up his too strenuous professional work and remained in the Southwest, and that if he did not follow that course he would as surely die, they built the little white house on the mountain side at Juniper Springs, above the Cañada del Oro. As Jimmy explained, "it was quite necessary, under the circumstances, that they live where they could see out."

It was during that first summer in Oracle that the neighbors began to speak of his tender care of his mother, for, even in those days when he was too ill to do more than think, his thoughts were all for her. And so lovingly did he try to shield her from the pain of his suffering, so cheerfully did he accustom her to the thought of the utter hopelessness of his professional future, and so courageously, for her sake, did he accept the pitifully small portion that life offered him, that the people marveled at the spirit

of the man. It was a question, they sometimes said, with a touch of sincere reverence in their voices, if Doctor Burton needed his mother as much as the doctor's mother needed him. But Jimmy and his mother knew that the truth of the matter was they needed each other.

And so in their mutual need both mother and son found compensation for their dreams that now could never come true. In place of the professional honors that were predicted with such confidence for her boy, and toward which she had looked with such pride, the mother saw her son honored by the love of the unpretentious country folk. From plans that had failed and hopes that were buried, Jimmy himself turned to the grandeur of the mountains and the beauty of tree and bush and flower—to the limitless spaces of the desert and the peace of the quiet stars. The life of the great eastern city, with its hunger for fame, its struggle for riches, its endless tumult and its restless longings, faded farther and farther away. The simple, more primitive, more peaceful life of God's great unimproved world became every day more satisfying.

To the roaming cowboys and miners and their kind, and to the people of the little mountain village, that tiny white house on the hill was known. And many a man, when things were going wrong, came to spend an hour with this friend whose understanding was so clear and whose counsel was so true. Many a girl or woman in need of comfort, strength or courage came to sit a while with Mrs. Burton. And some-

times a tired rider of the range would hear in the twilight dusk the clear, sweet song of Jimmy's flute and, hearing, would smile and lift his wide-brimmed hat; or perhaps a lonely prospector, camped for the night in some gulch or wash would hear, and, hearing, would think again of things that in his search for gold he had forgotten. And this is how Doctor James Burton became Saint Jimmy and Saint Jimmy's mother became Mother Burton to them all.

It was natural that the good doctor should become Marta Hillgrove's teacher, and that Mrs. Burton should mother the girl who, until her fathers brought her to the Cañada del Oro, had never known a woman's guiding love. Indeed, it was Saint Jimmy and his mother and all that their friendship meant to Marta that had kept the Pardners in that neighborhood. Never before since the beginning of their partnership had those wanderers stayed so long in one place. For four—nearly five—years Marta had been studying under Saint Jimmy; a fair equivalent of the usual college course. With this textbook education she had received from Mother Burton the kind of training that such a woman would have given a daughter of her own. And yet these most excellent teachers knew no more of their pupil's history than did those thoughtless ones who so freely discussed the girl and looked at her askance for what they thought her parentage might be.

It should be said, too, that this schooling which Marta had received from Saint Jimmy and his mother was wholly a matter of love. As Doctor Burton

explained to the Pardners, when they insisted that he should be paid "same as a reg'lar teacher," the work was really a blessing to him in that his pupil contributed more to his life than he could possibly give to hers; while Mother Burton warned the anxious fathers, gently but firmly, that if they ever said another word about pay they would ruin everything.

But as the years passed and she watched the amazing development of the girl's mind, and saw the unfolding of her richly endowed womanhood, wise Mother Burton came to wonder sometimes if Saint Jimmy's teaching was not more a matter of love than even he perhaps realized.

On that spring morning when Marta rode to Oracle and her fathers discussed the problem that so troubled them, Saint Jimmy sat in the yard before the cottage door. On every side he saw the Mariposa tulips lifting their lovely orange cups, and sweet pea blossoms swinging like pink and white fairies above a lilac carpet of wild verbena and purple fragrant hyptis, while against the rocks that were stained with splashes of gray and orange and red and yellow lichens stood the purple pentstemon. The mountain sides below were wondrous with the scarlet glory of the ocotillo and the indescribable beauty of the chollas and opuntias with their crowns and diadems of red and salmon and orange and pink. The slopes and benches of the lower levels were bright with great fields of golden brittle-bush; and beyond these, on the wide spaces of the mesa, he could see the

yuccas (our Lord's candles) in countless thousands, raising their stately shafts with eight-foot clusters of creamy-white bloom.

Mrs. Burton, leaving her housework for a moment, came to stand in the doorway. When they had spoken of the beautiful sight that never failed to move them—calling each other's attention to different favorite views—Saint Jimmy said:

"Mother, doesn't it all make you sort of hungry for something—something that can't be told in words?" he laughed in boyish embarrassment.

His mother smiled.

"Marta will be coming from Oracle with the mail, I suppose—this is Saturday, you know."

"Yes, I know," said Jimmy softly, and wondered if his mother guessed what it really was that he hungered for and could not talk about even to her.

Mrs. Burton was turning back into the house when they heard some one coming up the trail from the cañon. A moment later the Pardners appeared. Saint Jimmy and his mother knew at once that the old prospectors had come on business of greater moment than to make a mere neighborly call.

When they had exchanged the customary greetings and Marta's fathers had assured their friends that the girl was well, Thad and Bob sat looking at each other in troubled silence.

"Wal," said Bob, at last, "why don't you go ahead? She's your gal this week. Bein' her daddy makes it your play, don't it?"

Thad, rubbing his bald head desperately, made

several ineffectual attempts to speak. At last, with a recklessness born of this inner struggle, he addressed Mrs. Burton:

"You see, ma'am, me an' my pardner here has been takin' notice lately how my gal Marta is due, first thing we know, to be a growed-up woman."

"She is, indeed!" replied Jimmy's mother with an encouraging smile.

"Yes, ma'am, that's what me an' Bob here took notice. An' we've been figgerin' up that mebby it was time she knowed what we know about her. You an' your son knows the same as everybody does, I reckon, that we ain't Marta's real honest-to-God daddies."

"Yes," said Mrs. Burton, "but we have never, in any way, mentioned the matter to Marta."

"No, ma'am," said Thad, "an' we ain't neither."

"An' that's jest what's the matter now," put in Bob. "The gal ain't never been told nothin'."

Mrs. Burton looked at her son.

"I am sure that you men are right," said Saint Jimmy. "I have been wanting to talk with you about it. You ought to tell Marta everything you know of her and her people—how she came to you—everything."

The Pardners consulted each other silently. Then Thad turned to Marta's teacher; the old prospector's faded blue eyes were fixed on the younger man's face with a steady, searching gaze that permitted no evasion, even if Saint Jimmy had been disposed to parry the question.

"Is there, to your thinkin', any perticler reason why my gal ought to be told at this perticler time?"

Saint Jimmy smiled reassuringly.

"No particular reason, so far as I know," he said. "Of course you realize that there has always been more or less talk. Sooner or later the girl is bound to hear it. She should be fortified with the truth."

Again Bob and Thad looked at each other helplessly.

"An' if the truth ain't jest what you might call fortifyin'—what then?" said Thad at last.

"Yes," echoed Bob. "What then? What if my pardner an' me can't say that all the gossips is talkin' ain't so?"

Saint Jimmy did not answer. Mother Burton looked away. Old Thad rubbed his bald head in mournful meditation.

"Doctor Burton," said Bob slowly, as one feeling his way amid conversational dangers, "Thad an' me ain't to say blind, if we be gittin' old. We can still tell 'color' when we run across it." He consulted his pardner with a look and Thad nodded his head in approval. Bob continued: "We're almighty proud of what you been doin' for our gal," he caught himself quickly. "Excuse me, Pardner—for your gal, I mean."

Thad raised his hand—a gesture which signified that, in the stress of the situation, he waived the fine point of their usual courtesy, and for this crucial occasion acknowledged their joint fatherhood.

Old Bob swallowed, with difficulty, something

that seemed to obstruct his usual freedom of speech.

"An' I reckon you understand, sir, that we ain't noways lackin' in appreciation an' gratitude to you an' your ma for helpin' Marta to grow up into the young woman she is. My pardner an' me, we sure done what we could, an' we'd been glad to a-done more if it had a-been possible, but it wasn't, not for us, an' we're sensible to what it all means to our gal. If she wasn't trained up an' all educated like you an' your ma has made her, it wouldn't much matter what her own folks was or how she first come to us."

"I understand," said Saint Jimmy gently, "and I know that the girl could not love you men more if you were, in fact, her own fathers. I know, too, that nothing could make her love you less. But I am convinced that she should know all that you know about her."

"We would a-told her the story long ago," said Thad, "if only we'd a-knowed a little more than we do, or mebby, if we hadn't knowed as much, or if what little we do know didn't look so almighty bad."

"It will look a heap worse to her now than it ever did to us," said Bob.

"It sure will," agreed Thad, "an' so, you see, we've been waitin' an' puttin' it off, hopin' that we would mebby, somehow, find out something that, as it is, is lackin'." He appealed to Mrs. Burton: "You can see how it is, can't you, ma'am?"

"I understand," said the good woman, gently,

"but I agree with my son. Whatever it is, the story will make no difference in Marta's love for you, just as it has made no difference in your love for her."

"Yes," said Thad, "but how about the difference it might make to—" he paused and looked at his pardner helplessly. "Ahem—to—I mean——"

Bob spoke quickly:

"To you an' Saint Jimmy, ma'am. What difference will it make to you folks?"

Thad drew a deep breath of relief and rubbed his bald head with satisfaction.

Mother Burton met them bravely with:

"Nothing that you have to tell can change our feeling for Marta. I could not love her more if she were my own daughter."

The two old men looked at Saint Jimmy eagerly.

"You dead sure that nothin' would make you change toward our gal?" demanded Bob.

"You plumb certain, be you, sir?" said old Thad.

Saint Jimmy smiled reassuringly.

"As certain as I am of death," he answered.

With an air of excited relief Thad faced his pardner.

"That bein' the case I move, Pardner, that we tell Doctor Burton here what we know, an' he can tell our gal or not as he sees fit, and when he sees fit."

"Jest what I was about to offer myself," returned Bob. "You go ahead."

CHAPTER V

THE PROSPECTOR'S STORY

"No, sir, take it anyway you like, it jest naterally looks bad; an' that's all me an' my pardner knows about it."

"IT was about sixteen year ago," Thad began at last.

"Seventeen, the middle of next month," said Bob.

Thad continued:

"Me an' my pardner here was comin' in to Tucson from the Santa Rosa Mountains, which is down close to the Mexican line. We'd been out for about three months an' was needin' supplies. 'Long late in the afternoon of the second day from where we'd been workin', we stopped at a little ranch house about three mile this side of the line for water. We knowed the old Mexican man an' woman what lived there all right—'most everybody did—everybody like us old desert rats, that is—an' didn't nobody know any good of 'em either."

"Some claim that the old woman was Sonora Jack's mother," said Bob. "Sonora Jack, you know, is half Mex, and a mighty bad citizen, too. He's somewheres across the line right now, hidin' out for a killin' he an' his crowd made in a hold-

up' bout the same time that we're tellin' you of."

Thad took up the story.

"Well, sir, we'd filled our water bags an' was standin' talkin' with the old woman who'd come to watch us—the man, he was away it appeared—when all at once a little boy come trottin' 'round the corner of the cabin from behind somewheres."

"About three or four, he was," said Bob.

"About that," agreed Thad. "An' when he seen us he jest stopped short, kind of scared like, an' stood there cryin'.

"Well, sir, me an' Bob tumbled in a holy minute that he didn't belong there. We knowed them old Mexicans didn't have no kid that wasn't growed up long ago. An' this little chap didn't look like a Mexican youngster nohow. The old woman acted kind of rattled at us lookin' at the kid so sharp, an' started in tellin' us that the muchachito was one of her grandsons. That sounded fair enough at first, but when she turned an' yelled at the kid in Mex, givin' him the devil for not stayin' behind the house like she'd told him to, we seed that somethin' was wrong. He didn't savvy Mex no more than we do Chinee.

"While the poor little cuss was standin' there scared stiff an' cryin'—not knowin' what the old woman wanted, Bob here went down on one knee an' held out his hands invitin' like. 'Come here, sonny,' says he to the kid in English, 'come on over here an' let's have a look at you.'

"Well, sir, that youngster gave a funny little

laugh, right out through his tears, an' come runnin'.

"The old woman didn't know what to do; but I was keepin' one eye on her so she didn't dare try to start anything much.

"Bob, he asked the youngster, 'What's your name, sonny?' an' the little feller answered back, bright as a dollar: 'My name's Marta.'

"'Marta?' says Bob, lookin' up at me puzzled like. 'That's a funny name for a boy.'

"'I ain't no boy,' said the kid, quick as a flash, 'I'm a girl, I am.'"

"An' by smoke! she was," ejaculated Bob.

"Yes," continued Thad, "an' when the old woman seen that the little gal was talkin' to us—the old woman she didn't savvy a word of anything but Mex, but she could tell what was goin' on—when she see it, she jest naterally grabbed the youngster an' yanked her into the house an' shut the door.

"Me an' Bob made camp not far away that night, an' after supper, an' it had got good an' dark, we was settin' by the fire talkin' things over, when all at once we heard the sound of a wagon an' a child screamin'—sort of choked like. You can believe we wasn't long gettin' to where the sound come from. Them Mexicans was lightin' out with that little gal for across the border.

"By that time, me and my pardner was so plumb sure that there was somethin' wrong that we didn't waste no more strength in foolishness. We jest proceeded to give that hombre the third degree

'til he ups an' confesses that the baby was left with them by some white folks who was on a huntin' trip, an' that they was only keepin' the youngster 'til her daddy an' mammy come back for her.

"You can guess how quick me an' Bob was to believe any such yarn as that; so we figured the safest thing to do was to take the baby ourselves into Tucson; which we done.

"Well, sir, by the time we struck town the little gal had made such a hit with us both that we couldn't near think of givin' her up."

"Darndest affectionate kid that ever was," put in Bob. "Started right off first thing lovin' us two old rapscallions like we'd always belonged to her, an' callin' us both 'daddy.'"

"We sure done our best to find her real folks, though," said Thad. "We stayed in Tucson for more'n a month. But the authorities nor nobody couldn't get no hint nowhere about any kid bein' lost, nor stole, nor nothin'. Things was movin' pretty fast in this country them days, an' the sheriff always had his hands full; so it wasn't long 'til everybody got busy with some fresh excitement, an' me an' Bob was left with the baby on our hands. There didn't appear to be nothin' else we could do, so we jest decided that Providence, or good luck, or somethin', had fixed it so's us two old mavericks was blessed with a offspring whether we was regularly entitled to one or not. Then pretty soon we moved on over into the Graham Mountains, an' jest naterally took her along.

"We both was lovin' her so by now that we was about to fight to see which one was to be her daddy, when we compromised by agreein' to take turn an' turn about—week by week. An' that's how we come to give her both our names—Hillgrove. Her first name is Martha, we suppose; but Marta was the best she could ever tell us. An' that's about all there is of it up to the time we fetched her here an' you started in teachin' her."

"You see, ma'am," said Bob, "this here is the way me an' Thad has got it figgered: The baby must have been left with them Mexicans where we found her, 'cause she ain't Mexican nor any part Mexican herself. Wal, what kind of white folks do you reckon would go away an' leave a little gal like that, with such an outfit? They couldn't a-left her accidental like, 'cause if they had they'd a-come back for her, an' then they'd been huntin' us. With all the fuss we made about it in Tucson, somebody would a-knowed somethin' about her sure, if her people hadn't wanted to get shet of her on account of them bein' the sort they was. An' there ain't been no time since then that me an' Thad has been hard to find. Don't you see, her folks couldn't a-been decent even if her father an' mother was—was—I mean, even if she was borned all regular an' right—which don't look no way likely. Any way you take it, they must a-been a bad sort to throw away a baby like her."

"You can bet they was," added Thad mournfully, "for it's a dead immortal cinch that them old

Mexicans couldn't a-come by her no other way; 'cause they never went anywhere an' if they had stole her it sure would a-raised enough interest in the country for somebody to a-heard about it. No, sir, take it any way you like, it jest naterally looks bad. An'," the old prospector finished with an air of relief, "that's all me an' my pardner knows about it."

Saint Jimmy did not speak. He was evidently deeply moved by the strange story. Mrs. Burton was drying her eyes. The Pardners waited, with no little anxiety.

At last Bob asked timidly:

"Be you still thinkin', sir, as how our gal ought to be told?"

Reluctantly, Saint Jimmy answered:

"I am afraid that Marta must know."

He looked at his mother.

"I am sure she must know," said Mrs. Burton with quiet decision. "And you, my son, are the one to tell her. It will come to her easier from you, her teacher, than from any one else."

"Yes, ma'am," cried Thad eagerly. "That's the way me an' Bob figgered it."

"Will you do it, sir?" asked Bob.

"Yes," said Saint Jimmy, "I will tell her."

The Pardners sighed with relief.

"That sure lets us out of a mighty bad hole," said Thad. "It'll be a heap easier on our gal, too."

"It sure will," echoed Bob. "Ain't nobody can tell what kind of a God-awful mess us old fools would

a-made of it. We're almighty grateful to you, sir, for helpin' us out."

"We are that," came from Thad with pathetic earnestness.

Bob said hurriedly:

"An' now that it's all settled, Pardner, I move that me an' you pulls out of here before our gal happens along. I wouldn't be ketched by her right now for all the money we're goin' to have when we strike that big vein we're tunnelin' for."

"Which ain't so much as it might be at that," retorted Thad.

"You can't never tell," returned Bob with his usual cheery optimism, "gold is where you find it."

When Bob and Thad were gone, Saint Jimmy and his mother, discussing the matter, were forced to agree with the Pardners. It certainly did look bad. In fact it looked so bad that Saint Jimmy was not at all happy under the burden of the responsibility which the old prospectors had shifted from their own shoulders to his. He foresaw that it would not be easy to tell this young woman whom he had educated, and whose fine, sensitive pride he knew so well, this story that he had just heard from her two foster fathers.

When Marta stopped at the Burtons' on her way home from Oracle, later in the day, neither Saint Jimmy nor his mother mentioned the Pardners' visit, and there seemed to be no opportunity for the girl's teacher to tell her the story he was so sure

she should know. Some other time, he told himself, it would be easier, perhaps.

While the Pardners' daughter was riding home from the Burtons' that afternoon, and the Pardners were at work in their little mine, Natachee the Indian stood on a point of rock, high on the mountain side—so high that he could look beyond the Cañon of Gold and afar off, over the brown desert that, from the foothills of the Catalinas, stretches away, weary mile after weary mile, until, in the shadowy blue distance, it is lost in the sky.

To those of us who are accustomed to the present-day Indian in his white man's garb, doing the white man's work on the white man's roads and ranches, Natachee would have aroused peculiar, not to say amusing, interest. From the single feather in the headband which bound his long, raven-black hair to his beaded moccasins, he was dressed in the picturesque costume of his savage fathers. Save for a broad hunting knife, he was armed only with the primitive bow and arrows. He was in the best years of his manhood and his face and bearing would have graced the hero of a Fenimore Cooper Indian tale.

But however much he seemed out of step with the times, that lone figure, standing sentinel-like on the rocky point, fitted his wild surroundings. So, indeed, might one of his ancestors have stood to watch the strange new human life when it first began to move along those trails that, until then,

had known only the sandaled and moccasined feet of prehistoric peoples.

An hour passed. The Indian held his place as motionless as the rock against which he leaned, while his somber gaze ranged over those mighty reaches of desert and mountain and sky. High over Rice Peak a golden eagle wheeled on guard before the nest of his royal mate. But Natachee seemed not to see. From a dead oak on Samaniego Ridge a red-tailed hawk screamed his shrill challenge. The Indian apparently did not hear. A company of buzzards circled above a dark object in the wash below the Wheeler Ranch corrals. Natachee gave no heed. A ground squirrel leaped to a near-by rock to sit bolt upright with bright eyes fixed upon the red man, the while he sounded a chirping note of inquiry. But the Indian's gaze remained steadfastly fixed on that distant landscape where he could see a cloud of dust that was raised by a swiftly moving automobile on the Oracle road. On the Bankhead Highway there were two similar clouds. In the purple haze beyond the point of the Tortollita Mountains, a streamer of smoke marked the position of a Southern Pacific Overland train that was approaching Tucson from the western coast. The face of the red watchman on the mountain side was set stern and grim. In his somber eyes there was a gleam of savage meaning.

The sun was just touching the tops of the Tucson hills when the Indian started and leaned forward with suddenly quickened interest.

No ordinary power of human vision would have noticed that black speck in the vast stretch of country, much less could the ordinary observer have said exactly what it was that had attracted the Indian's attention. But Natachee saw that the tiny dot, moving so slowly on the old road into the Cañada del Oro, was a man. His interest was excited to an unusual degree because the man was walking, unaccompanied even by a pack burro.

And now the evening wind from the desert, fragrant with the smell of greasewood, mesquite and cat-claw, swept along the mountain side. The Tucson hills were massed dark blue with their outlines sharply cut against the colors of the sunset. Natachee, watching, saw that lone figure on the trail below enter the Cañon of Gold and lose itself in the gathering dusk.

As the shadows thickened, the night prowlers on padded feet crept from their dark retreats into the gloom. Owls and bats on silent wings swept by. Old ghosts of the dead past stirred again on the old desert and mountain ways. In the deeper dusk that now filled the cañon, voices awoke—strange, murmuring, whispering, phantom voices that seemed to come from an innumerable company of dreary, hopeless souls. The light went out of the western sky. Details of plant and rock and bush were lost. Weird and wild, like a mysterious spirit brooding over the scene, the dark figure of the Indian on the rocky point above the Cañon of Gold was silhouetted against the starlit sky.

In the little white house on the mountain side, Saint Jimmy was thinking of the strange story that the Pardners had told.

In their home beside the cañon creek, the old prospectors and their partnership daughter were sleeping, with no dreams of the strange leading of the tangled threads of lives to the Cañon of Gold.

Far away to the south, in old Mexico, two men sat in a cantina. Between them, on a table, with glasses and a bottle of mescal, lay a crudely drawn map. As they talked together in low tones, they referred often to the rude sketch which bore in poorly written words "La mina con la puerta de fierro en la Cañada del Oro"—The mine with the door of iron in the Cañon of the Gold.

CHAPTER VI

NIGHT

Night skies are kind to those who love the stars;
to others they are heavy with brooding fears.

THE man who was following the old road up the Cañon of Gold had made his way a mile or more from the point where he was last seen by the Indian, when the deepening twilight warned him of the nearness of the night. It was evident, from the pedestrian's irresolute movements and from his manner of nervous doubt in selecting a spot for his camp, that not only was he a stranger in the Cañada del Oro, but as well that he was unaccustomed to such surroundings.

He was a young man of about twenty-two or twenty-three years—tall, but rather slender, with a face habitually clean shaven but covered, just now, with a stubby beard of several days' growth. His skin, where it was exposed, was sunburned rather than tanned that deep color so marked in the out-of-doors men of the West. On the whole, he gave the impression, somehow, of one but recently recovered from a serious illness; and yet he did not appear overfatigued, though the pack which he carried was not light and he had evidently been many hours on the road. In spite of his rude dress and unkempt

appearance due to his mode of traveling there was, in his bearing, the unmistakable air of a man of business. But he was that type of business man that knows something more than the daily grind of money-making machines. His world, apparently, was not wholly a world of factories and banks and institutions of commerce.

Forced, at last, by the approaching darkness, to decide upon some place to spend the night, the traveler selected a spot beside the cañon creek, a hundred yards from the road. But even after he had lowered his heavy pack to the ground, he stood for some minutes looking anxiously about, as if still uncertain as to the wisdom of his selection.

Nor was the man's manner wholly that of inexperience. Suddenly, without thought of his evening meal, or any preparation for his comfort until the morning, he climbed again up the steep bank to the road, where he gazed back along the way he had come and studied the mountain sides with eyes of dread. The man was in an agony of fear. Not until it was too dark to distinguish objects at any distance did he return to the place where he had left his pack and set about the necessary work of preparing his supper and making his bed.

Hurriedly, as best he could in the failing light, he gathered a supply of wood and, after several awkward failures, succeeded in kindling a fire. From his pack he took a small frying pan, a coffeepot, a tin cup, and a meager supply of food. With these, and with water from the creek, he made shift to pre-

pare an unaccustomed meal. Several times he paused, to stand gazing into the fire as if lost in thought. Again and again he turned his head quickly to listen. Often with a shuddering start he whirled to search the darkness beyond the flickering shadows, as if in fear of what the light of his fire might bring upon him. When he had eaten his poorly prepared supper, he spread his blankets and lay down.

There was something pitiful in the trivial and puny details of this lone stranger's camp in the wild Cañada del Oro. There was something sinister in the night life that crept and crawled in the darkness about him. There was something pathetic in the man's lying down to sleep, unprotected, amid such surroundings.

The mountains are very friendly to those who know them; to those who know them not, they are grim and dreadful—when the day is gone. Night skies are kind to those who love the stars; to others they are heavy with brooding fears. The timid life of the wild places is good company for those who know each voice and sound; to others every movement is a menace, every call a voice of danger—when the sun is down.

Cowering in his blankets the man listened for a while to the strange and fearful things that stirred in the near-by bushes, on the rocky ledges, and on the mountain sides above. He heard the cañon voices whispering, murmuring, moaning. The night deepened. The boisterous song of the creek be-

came a sullen growl. The mountain walls seemed to close in. The stars above the peaks and ridges were lonely and far away. The camp fire, so tiny in the gloom, burned low.

The sleeping man groaned and stirred uneasily as if in pain, and a fox that had crept too close slipped away in startled flight. The man cried out in his sleep, and a coyote that was following the scent of the camp up the wind turned aside to slink into the thicket of mesquite. The man awoke and springing to his feet stood as if at bay, and a buck that was feeding not far away lifted his antlered head to listen with wary alertness. From somewhere on the heights came the cry of a mountain lion, and at the sound the night was suddenly as still as death. The man shuddered and quickly threw more wood on the dying fire. Again he lay down to cower in his blankets—to sleep restlessly—and to dream his troubled dreams.

In the first faint light of the morning, a dark form might have been seen moving stealthily down the mountain above the stranger's camp. The buck, with a snort of fear, leaped away, crashing through the brush. The prowling coyote fled down the cañon. On every side the wild creatures of the night slunk into the dense covers of manzanita and buckthorn and cat-claw.

Silently, as the gray shadows through which he crept, Natachee the Indian drew near the place where the white man lay. From behind a near-by bush the Indian observed every detail of the camp.

When the form wrapped in the blanket did not stir, the Indian stole from his sheltering screen and with soft-footed, noiseless movements, inspected the stranger's outfit. He even bent over the sleeping man to see his face. The man moved—tossing an arm and muttering. Swift as a fox the Indian slipped away; silent as a ghost he disappeared among the bushes.

The gray of the morning sky changed to saffron and rose and flaming red. The shadowy trees and bushes assumed definite shapes. The detail of the rocks emerged from the gloom. The man awoke.

He had just finished breakfast when he heard the sound of horse's hoofs on the road. With a startled cry he leaped to his feet. The Lizard was riding toward him.

Like a hunted creature the man drew back, half crouching, as if to escape. But it was too late. Pale and trembling he stood waiting as the horseman drew up beside the road, on the bank above the creek, and sat looking down upon him and his camp.

CHAPTER VII

THE STRANGER'S QUEST

"What's yer name? Whar ye from? What're you a-doin' here?"

THE Lizard's preliminary inspection of the stranger and his camp might or might not have been prompted by a habit of caution. When it was finished he called a loose-mouthed "Howdy" and, without waiting for a response to his greeting, spurred his mount, slipping and sliding with rolling stones and a cloud of dust, down to the edge of the creek.

Dismounting and throwing the bridle rein over his horse's head, he slouched forward—a vapid grin on his sallow, weasel-like face.

"I seed yer smoke an' 'lowed as how I'd drop along an' take a look at who's here; bein' as I war aimin' t' ride t' Oracle sometime t'-day anyhow. Not as I've got anythin' perticler t' go thar fer nuther, 'cept t' jist set in front of th' store a spell an' gas with th' fellers. Thar's allus a bunch hangin' 'round of a Sunday."

He looked curiously at the stranger's outfit and, ignoring the fact that the camper had not spoken, seated himself with the air of one taking his welcome for granted.

The stranger smiled. The fear that had so shaken him a few moments before was gone, and there was relief in his voice as he bade his visitor a quite unnecessary welcome.

"Ye'r a-footin' hit, be ye?" the Lizard continued with garrulous ease. "Wal, that's one way of goin'; but I'll take a good hoss fer mine. A feller'll jist naterally wear out quick ernough no matter how keerful he'd be. Never 'lowed I had ary call t' take an' plumb *walk* myse'f t' death on purpose. Them's good blankets you've got thar. Need 'em, too, these nights, if 'tis spring. That thar coffeepot ain't no 'count, though—not fer me, that is—wouldn't hold half what I'd take three times a day, reg'lar." He laughed loudly as if a good joke were hidden somewhere in his remarks if only the other were clever enough to find it.

"You live in this neighborhood, do you?" the stranger asked.

"What, me? Oh shore. My name's Bill Janson —live down th' cañon a piece, jist below whar th' road comes in. Paw an' maw an' me live thar t'gether. We drifted in from Arkansaw eight year ago come this fall. What's yer name? Whar ye from? What're you a-doin' here?"

The stranger hesitated before he answered slowly:

"My name is — Edwards — Hugh Edwards. I came here from Tucson. I want to prospect—look for gold, you know. I heard there were some—ah—placers, I think you call them, in this cañon."

The Lizard grinned, a wide-mouthed grin of

superior knowledge. "Hit's plumb easy t' see y' know all about prospectin'. Y'r some edicated, I jedge. Ben t' school an' them thar college places a right smart lot, ain't y' now?"

The other replied with some sharpness:

"I suppose it is not impossible for one to learn how to dig for gold, even if one has learned to read and write, is it?"

The Lizard responded heartily, but with tolerant superiority:

"Larn—shore—ain't nothin' t' pannin' gold 'cept a lot of hard work an' mighty pore pay. Anybody'll larn ye. Take the Pardners up yonder—old Bob Hill an' Thad Grove—they'd—" he checked himself suddenly and slapped a lean thigh. "By Glory! I'll bet a pretty you've done come t' find that thar old lost Mine with th' Iron Door, heh? Ain't ye now?" He leered at the stranger with shifty, close-set eyes, his long head with its narrow sloping brow cocked sidewise with what was meant to be a very knowing, "I-have-you-now-sir" sort of air.

The man who had given his name as Hugh Edwards laughed.

"Really I can't say that I would object to finding any old mine if it was a good one, would you?"

The Lizard shook his head solemnly and with a voice and manner that was nicely calculated to invite confidence, replied:

"Thar's been a lot of people, one time an' another, a-huntin' this Mine with th' Iron Door. Thar was one bunch that come clean from Spain; an' they

had a map an' everythin'. You ain't got no map ner writin' of any sort, now, have you?"

"No," returned the stranger. "But I suppose it is true that there is gold to be found here?"

The Lizard was plainly disappointed but evidently deemed it unwise to press his inquiry.

"Oh, shore, thar's gold here—some—fer them what likes t' work fer hit. They've allus been a-diggin' in this here cañon an' in these here mountains, as ye kin see by their old prospect holes everywhar. But nobody ain't never made no big strikes yet. Thar's one feller a-livin' in these hills what don't dig no gold though; an' they do say, too, as how he knows more 'bout th' ol' lost mine than ary other man a-livin'. Some says he even knows whar hits at." The Lizard shook his head solemnly. "You shore want t' watch out fer *him*, too. He's plumb bad—that's what I'm a-tellin' you."

"Yes?" said Hugh Edwards, encouragingly.

"Uh-huh, he ain't no white man neither. He's Injun—calls hisse'f Natachee, whatever that is. He's one of these here school Injuns gone wild agin—lives all 'lone way in the upper part of th' cañon somewhar, whar hits so blamed rough a goat couldn't get 'round; an' togs hisse'f up with th' sort of things them old-time Injuns used to wear—won't even use a gun, jist packs a bow an' arrers. I ain't got no use fer an Injun nohow. This here's a white man's country, I say, an' this here Natachee he's the worst I ever did see. He'd plunk one of them thar arrers of hisn inter you, er slit yer throat any old time if he

dast. I can't say fer shore whether he knows about this Mine with th' Iron Door er not, but hit's certain shore you got t' watch him. Hit's all right fer that thar Saint Jimmy an' them old Pardners t' be friends with him if they like hit, but I know what I know."

Hugh Edwards did not overlook this opportunity to learn something of the people who lived in the Cañon of Gold; and the Lizard was more than willing to tell all he knew, perhaps even to add something for good measure. When at last the Lizard arose reluctantly, the stranger had heard every current version of the history and relationship of the two old prospectors and their partnership daughter, with copious comments on their characters, sidelights on their personal affairs, their intercourse with their neighbors, their business, and every possible theory explaining them.

"Not that thar's anybody what really knows anythin',"—the Lizard was careful to make this clear—"'cept of course that old story 'bout them a-findin' th' gal somewhars when she warn't much more'n a baby; which, as I say, ain't no way nateral enough fer anybody t' believe—'cause babies like her ain't jist found—picked up anywhar, as you may say, without no paw ner maw ner nothin'. An' if thar warn't somethin' wrong about hit, what would them two old devils be so close-mouthed fer? Why, sir, one time when I asked 'em about hit—jist sort of interested an' neighborly like—they ris up like they was a-fixin' t' climb all over me. Yes, they did

—ye kin see yerself hit ain't all straight, whatever 'tis. Even a feller like you can't help puttin' two an' two together if he's got any sense a-tall.

"Wal," he concluded regretfully, "I shore got t' be gittin' on t' Oracle er hit won't be no use fer me t' go, nohow." He moved slowly toward his horse. "Better come along," he added. "This here trail t' Oracle goes right past the Pardners' place, an' Saint Jimmy's an' George Wheeler's. Best come along an' see th' country an' git acquainted."

"Thanks," said Edwards, "but really I can't go to-day. I want to get settled somewhere before I take much time for purely social matters, you see."

"Huh," grunted the Lizard, "gettin' settled ain't nothin'; hit's all day 'til t'morrer ain't hit?" Then, as if suddenly inspired with the possibilities of having a friend at the very source of so much interesting, if speculative, information, the Lizard added: "I'll tell ye what ye do, you come along with me as fer as th' Pardners' place. They'll he'p ye t' get located. They're all right that a-way, an' there ain't nothin' them two old-timers don't know about th' prospectin' game. An' right up th' cañon, not more'n a half a quarter from them, is an old cabin you could take. Hit war built by some prospector long time ago. George Wheeler, he told me. Seems th' feller lived thar fer two er three year an' then went away an' didn't never come back. You might have t' fix th' shack up a bit, but that wouldn't be no work; an' thar's allus some gold t' be found up

an' down th' creek. Th' Pardners they'll larn ye how, an' mebby *you* kin larn somethin' 'bout them an' that thar gal of theirn."

"Thank you," returned Edwards, "but I really can't go now. I am not packed yet, you see."

But the Lizard was not to be deprived of the advantage of his opportunity. "Aw, shucks—what's th' matter with ye? Grab yer stuff an' come along. Ye can't be stand-offish with me."

Because there seemed to be no way of refusing the invitation, the stranger hastily threw his things together and, with his pack on his back, set out up the cañon in company with the Lizard.

On the steep side of the mountain above, Natachee, creeping like a dark shadow among the rocks and bushes, followed the two men.

Saint Jimmy, that Sunday morning, was sitting with a book by the window. But Mother Burton, looking through the door from their tiny kitchen where she was busy with her household work, could see that her son was not reading. Jimmy's book was open, but his eyes were fixed upon the far distant horizon where the desert, with its dreamy maze of colors, becomes a faint blue shadow against the sky. And Jimmy's mother knew that his thoughts were as far from the printed page as that shadowy sky-line was distant from the window where he sat.

Often she had seen him in those moods—sitting so still that the spirit seemed to have gone out from

its temporary dwelling place to visit for a little those places which lie so far beyond the horizon of all fleshly vision and earthly hopes and aspirations. Of what was he thinking, she wondered, if indeed it could be said at such times that he was thinking at all. What was he seeing, with that far-away look in his eyes, as of one whose vision had been trained in the schools of suffering, of disappointments, and failures, and disillusions, to a more than physical strength. Was he communing with some one over there in that world beyond the sky-line of material things? Was he merely dreaming of what might have been? Or was he living in what might be? Wise Mother Burton, to know that there were certain rooms in her son's being that even her mother love could not unlock. Wise Mother Burton, to understand, to know, when to speak and when to be still.

Saint Jimmy was aroused at last by the clatter of iron-shod hoofs on the cañon trail. An instant later, Nugget, running with glorious strength and ease, dashed into view, and Marta's joyous self came between the man at the window and the distant sky-line. Another moment and the girl stood in the open doorway.

CHAPTER VIII

THE NEW NEIGHBOR

> But what a man is, *that* is a matter of concern to every one who is called by circumstance to associate with him.

WITH a merry greeting to Saint Jimmy, Marta ran straight to the welcoming arms of Mother Burton.

"Goodness me, child," the older woman exclaimed when she had kissed her and held her close for a moment as such mothers do, "you look as if—as if you were going to jump right out of your skin; I do declare!"

And Saint Jimmy, watching them, silently agreed with his mother, thinking that he had never seen the girl quite so animated. Her vivid, flamelike beauty seemed to fill the house with joyous warmth and light, while her laughter, in quick response to Mrs. Burton's words, rang with such happy abandon, and thrilled with such tingling excitement, that her teacher knew something unusual must have happened.

"What is it?" cried Mother Burton, shaking the girl playfully, and laughing with her. "What is the matter with you? What are you so excited about? Have Thad and Bob struck it rich at last?"

Marta shook her head.

"No, but it is something almost as good. We have a new neighbor."

Mother Burton looked from Marta to her son inquiringly, as if mildly puzzled to know why the mere arrival of a newcomer in the neighborhood, unusual as it was, should cause such manifestations.

Saint Jimmy, smiling, asked:

"What is his name? Where is he from? And what is he like?"

The girl's face was glowing with color and her eyes were bright as she answered:

"His name is Hugh Edwards. He came here from Tucson. I didn't quite understand where he lived before he went to Tucson." She paused and the ghost of a troubled frown fell across her brow. "But it was somewhere," she finished brightly.

"Quite likely you are right," said Jimmy, grave as a judge on the bench.

"Yes," she continued, "and he has come here to stay. He is awfully poor—poorer than any of us. Why, he hasn't even a burro to pack his outfit—had to pack it himself on his back, and he has been sick too, but he doesn't look a bit sick now." She laughed a little laugh of charming confusion. "He looks as if—as if—oh, as if he could do just anything —you know what I mean."

"You make it very clear," murmured Saint Jimmy.

Mother Burton made a curious little noise in her throat.

Marta looked from one to the other suspiciously. Then a bit defiantly she said:

"I don't care, he does. And he is different from anybody that ever came to the Cañada del Oro before—for that matter, he is different from anybody that I have ever seen anywhere."

"Dear me," murmured Mother Burton, "how interesting! But how is he different, dear?"

The girl answered honestly:

"I can't exactly tell what it is. For one thing, it is easy to see that he is educated. But of course Jimmy is too, so it can't be *that*. I am sure, too, that he has lived in a big city somewhere and has known lots of nice people, but so has Jimmy. I don't know what it is."

"I judge he is not, then, one of our typical old prospectors," said Saint Jimmy.

Again the girl's joyous, unaffected laughter bubbled forth.

"Old! He is no older than you are; I suspect not quite so old, and he has the nicest eyes, almost as nice as you, Jimmy—only, only different, somehow—nice in another way, I mean. And he knows absolutely nothing about prospecting. He is so green it is funny. But he's going to live in the old Dalton cabin right next door to us and we're going to teach him."

"Fine," said Saint Jimmy with proper enthusiasm, and managed somehow to hide the queer, sinking pain that made itself felt suddenly down deep inside of him. Saint Jimmy was skilled by long practice in hiding pain.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mother Burton. "This is interesting. But I must finish my morning work," she added, moving toward the kitchen.

"I'll help," volunteered Marta quickly, and started after the older woman.

But Mother Burton answered:

"No, no, I was almost finished when you came." Then catching the girl in her arms impulsively, and looking toward her son whose face was turned again to the far-off horizon, she added in a hurried whisper: "Get him out of doors, dear, he has been sitting like that all this blessed morning—make him go for a walk."

Marta led her teacher straight to their favorite spot on the mountain side, some distance from the house. Here, in the shade of a gnarled and twisted cedar that for a century or more had looked down upon the varied life that moved through the Cañon of Gold below, they had spent many an hour over the girl's studies. Against the bole of the tree they had contrived a rude shelf and pegs for hats and wraps. Mrs. Burton had contributed an old kitchen table and two chairs that neither rain nor sun could injure, and there was a large, flat-topped rock that served as bookcase and desk, or for a variety of other purposes, as it might happen.

On this occasion, Marta converted the rock into a couch by throwing herself full length upon it with the unconscious freedom of a schoolboy. Saint Jimmy seated himself in a chair and, in defiance of all

schoolmaster propriety, elevated his feet to the table top.

They talked a while, as neighbors will, of the small affairs of the country side. But Doctor Burton could see that Marta's thoughts were not of the things they were saying; and so, presently, from her rocky couch, the girl spoke again of the stranger who had come to be her nearest neighbor. She described him now in fuller detail—his eyes, his voice, his smile. She contrasted him with the Pardners, the Lizard, and with other men whom she had seen. She imagined fanciful stories for his past and invented for him various wonderful futures. And always she came back to the curious assertion that he was like her teacher, only different.

And Saint Jimmy, as he listened, asked an occasional encouraging question and studied her as in his old professional days he might have studied a patient. Never before had he seen the girl in such a mood. It was as if something deep-buried in her inner self was striving to break its way through to the surface of her being, as a deep-buried seed, when its time comes, forces its way through the dark earth to the light and sun.

Then for some time the girl was silent. With her head pillowed on one arm, and her eyes half closed, she lay as if she had drifted with the currents of her wandering thoughts into the quietude of dreams—dreams that were as intangible, yet as real, as the blue haze and purple shadows through which she saw the distant desert and mountains.

And Saint Jimmy, too, was still; while his face was turned away toward the far-off horizon, as if he saw there things which he might not talk about.

On the pine-clad heights of Mount Lemmon there were a few scattered patches of snow that had not yet yielded to the spring; but the air was soft and fragrant with the perfumes of warm earth and growing plants and opening blossoms. There was the low hum of the bees that were mining in the fragrant cat-claw bushes for the gold they stored in their wild treasure-houses in the cliffs. Not far away a gambrel partridge gallantly assured his plump gray mate, who sat on the nest in the shelter of a tall mescal plant, that there was no danger. A Sonora pigeon, from the top of a lone sahuaro, called his soft, deep-throated mating call. And a vermilion flycatcher sprang into the air from his perch near-by and climbed higher and higher into the blue and then, after holding himself aloft for a moment, puffed out his red feathers, and, twittering in a mad love ecstasy, came drifting back like a brilliant-colored thistle bloom, or an oversized and fiery-tinted dandelion tuft.

Marta's teacher had not forgotten that the Pardners had trusted him to tell their girl the things that they—Saint Jimmy and his mother—were agreed she should know. And Saint Jimmy meant to tell her. But somehow this did not seem to be the time. He stole a look at the girl lying on the rocks. No, this was not the time. He could not tell her

just now. He would wait. Some other time, perhaps, it would be easier.

"Jimmy," said the girl at last, and her words came slowly as if she spoke out of the haze of her dreams, "when you went to school—I don't mean when you were just a little boy, but when you were almost a man—was it a big school?"

Saint Jimmy did not answer at once, then, without taking his eyes from what ever it was that he was looking at in the distance, he said:

"Why, yes, it was a fairly large school."

"And were there both men and women students?"

"Yes, there were a good many women in the University, and a few in the medical school, where I finally finished."

"I expect you had lots of friends, didn't you, Jimmy? I should think you would—men and women friends both. And I suppose there were all kinds of good times—parties and dances and picnics."

Doctor Burton turned suddenly to look at her. "What in the world are you driving at now?"

"Please, Jimmy," she said wistfully, "I want to know."

And something made him look away again.

"I suppose I had my share of friends," he answered. "And there was a reasonable amount of fun, as there always is at school, you know. But we—most of us—worked hard, too."

"Yes," she returned quickly, "and you dreamed and planned the great things you would do in the world when your school days should be over, and, in

spite of all your friends and the good times, you could hardly wait to begin—yes, I am sure that is the way it would be."

Saint Jimmy did not speak.

"And when your school days were finished, and you were actually a doctor in a big city, you still had lots of men and women friends, and you found a little time, now and then, for parties and—and dinners and such things, didn't you, Jimmy?"

Saint Jimmy smiled, a patient, shadowy smile as he answered:

"My practice at first certainly left me plenty of time for other things."

The girl did not notice the smile, because she was not looking at her companion.

"You lived in a nice house, too, with books and pictures and—and carpets on the floors. Do you know, I think I have wanted more than anything else in the world to live in a house with carpets on the floors. That is, I mean, I have wanted it ever since I knew there were such things. Do you know, Jimmy, I never saw a house with carpets until that first day I came to see you and Mother Burton?"

She laughed a little.

"That was a long, long time ago, wasn't it? And I couldn't much more than read then. Gee! how scared I was of you and Mother Burton."

"You have made wonderful progress in your studies and in every way," said Jimmy, proudly.

"Yes," she returned. "The carpets did it—the carpets and you and Mother Burton. I don't see

how you ever managed to teach me, though. I guess you just learned by doctoring so many sick people. It must be a wonderful, satisfying work—helping people, I mean, like a doctor, or a teacher, or any work like that. It's not like just finding gold in the ground. Even though you do have to work so hard to get the gold, it's not like—like working for *people*—or *with* people. Getting gold out of the ground seems to take you away from people. You don't seem to be doing anything for anybody—but only just for yourself. Prospectors and workers like that 'most always live alone, I have noticed. I don't think many of them are very happy either. I have seen quite a lot of prospectors in my time, you know, Jimmy. In fact, except for you, prospectors and that sort are the only kind of men I have ever known—until now."

Saint Jimmy was watching her closely.

"Yes," he said softly, as if he did not wish to disturb her mood.

"I suspect it was pretty hard, wasn't it, Jimmy, when you got sick yourself and had to give up your work and all your plans and leave your nice home and all your friends and everything and come away out here to get well, and then to find that you never could go back but must stay here always—poor Jimmy! It must have been mighty hard."

"It wasn't exactly easy," he said slowly, "not at first. I fought a good deal until I learned better. After that it was not so hard—only at times, perhaps. Even now, I rebel occasionally, but not for long."

Which was as near a complaint as any one had ever heard from Doctor Jimmy Burton.

"Jimmy," said Marta earnestly, "I think that you are the most wonderful man that ever was—that ever could be."

Saint Jimmy shrugged his shoulders, and waved a protesting hand.

"But you are," she insisted, "and you know how I love you, don't you? Not merely because you have helped me as you have, but because you are *you*. You *do* know, don't you, Jimmy?"

There was an odd note in Jimmy's voice now—it might have been gladness—it might have been protest—or perhaps it was both—with a hint of pain.

"Marta! I——"

He stopped as if he found himself suddenly unable to finish whatever it was that he had started to say. It may be that this was one of the times when Saint Jimmy was not wholly reconciled to the part that life had assigned to him.

Apparently Marta did not notice her teacher's manner. Her thoughts must have been centered elsewhere because she said, quite as if she had been considering it all the time:

"I feel sure that Mr. Edwards has been hurt some way, just as you have, Jimmy. I mean that he has been to school, and had a world of nice friends and good times, and then started his real work and all that, and, now for some reason, has had to give up his work and home and friends and everything, and

come out here. He didn't tell us much, but you could sort of feel that he was that kind of a man. You *can* feel those things about men, can't you, Jimmy?"

Jimmy nodded:

"I suppose so."

"I don't know why he didn't tell us more about himself—about before he came to Tucson, I mean. Perhaps he will some day; but he acts as if he didn't like to think about it now. You know what I mean, don't you?"

"Yes, I know."

"It is rather important that one have a past, isn't it, Jimmy?" She smiled as she added: "Rather important that one have the right kind of a past, I mean."

"To my mind it is quite important," answered Jimmy soberly. And suddenly he remembered again the story that the Pardners had told.

She nodded thoughtfully.

"You have talked to me a lot about heredity and breeding and good blood and early environment and those things. I suspect it is your being a doctor that makes you consider them as you do. And Mother Burton, she has told me a lot, too, about your ancestors, away back. And so I can see that it is your past and the things you have to remember that make you the kind of a man you are. If you didn't have the father and mother that you had, and the fathers and mothers that they had, and if you hadn't had the schools and the friends and the

home with carpets and the work of helping people that you have had, why, you wouldn't be you at all, would you, Jimmy?"

Saint Jimmy moved uneasily. He wished now, in the light of the Pardners' story and their conclusion as to the birth and parentage of this girl, that he had not included some subjects in his pupil's course of study.

Marta continued as if, scarcely conscious of her companion's presence, she were thinking aloud.

"And so if—if any one else *did* have the same kind of things to remember that you have, he would be the same kind of a man that you are—not exactly, of course. He might not be a doctor, or might not be sick, but on the whole—well—you see what I mean, don't you, Jimmy?"

Saint Jimmy was quite sure that he saw her meaning. In fact, Doctor Burton was fast being convinced that he realized, more clearly than Marta herself, the real meaning of her unusual mood. Her next words confirmed his fast-growing suspicion that, however scientifically right he had been in his teaching, he had not been altogether kind in stressing certain truths.

"It's funny that I never really thought of it before," she said, "but I don't seem to have any past at all. All I can remember is just moving around with my two fathers, who, of course, are not my fathers at all—at least not both of them. And, if it were not for you and Mother Burton, we wouldn't have stayed here any longer than we did the other places. I think I must have been born while my

real father and mother were moving somewhere. I never cared much about it before, Jimmy, but somehow I wish—now—that I—that I knew who I am. I wish—I wish—I had things to remember—such as you and Mr. Edwards have—schools and friends and good times and a home with carpets—I mean."

There was a suspicious brightness in the frank eyes and her lips were trembling a little; a state of affairs very unusual to the Pardners' daughter.

Saint Jimmy realized that it was going to be even harder than he had foreseen to make known to this girl the things he had promised to tell her. Certainly he could not tell her just now.

His voice was gentle as he finally said:

"I wouldn't worry about all that, if I were you, dear. You see, it doesn't really matter so much whether you know or not—your people must have been the best kind of people because you are what you are, and after all, it is what you are right now that counts. It is your own dear self, and not what you might have been that matters, don't you see? Why, you have a better education already than most girls of your age. As for the rest—the friends and all that—those will come in time, I am sure."

She smiled her gratitude bravely, then:

"Jimmy, may I ask you something more—something real personal?"

"As personal as you like," he answered gravely.

"Well, among all your friends at school, and among all the people you met and knew afterwards,

was there ever—was there ever one who was more than all the others—one girl or woman, I mean?"

Jimmy considered, then deliberately:

"You mean, in my school days and before I was forced to give up my work?"

She nodded.

"No," said Jimmy readily. "Once or twice I thought there might be, but I soon found out that I was mistaken—of course I am glad now that I found it out."

"But didn't you, in all of your plans and dreams for your life and work—didn't you ever include some one, didn't you ever plan for a—for—well, for"—she finished triumphantly—"for two little boys like the Wheelers have?"

"I looked forward in a general way to a home and children, as I think every man does," he answered.

She caught him up eagerly:

"You really think that every man includes such things in his plans?"

"At least," he replied, "I fail to see how any normal, right-thinking man can ignore such things in his life plans."

"I wonder if that could be it?" said Marta.

"You wonder what?"

"If Mr. Edwards came to the Cañada del Oro because his plans included some one who refused to be included."

"Good Lord!" ejaculated Saint Jimmy under his breath.

"No," she continued, "I don't believe that is it. He doesn't act as though that was the reason."

Suddenly her mood changed. She seemed to awaken to some hitherto unrealized possibilities of her life, and to grasp with startled fierceness a defiant truth.

"Jimmy," she cried, "just because I have no past is no reason why I should not have a future, is it?"

Before he could find an answer she went on, and her words came rushing, tumbling, hurrying out, as if the floodgate of her emotions were suddenly lifted and the passionate spirit of her released.

"I can see now that I have always been like our cañon creek in summer, just playing along any old way, taking things as they are, without even caring whether I stopped or not, but now—now I feel like the creek is to-day, with its springtime life, boiling and roaring and leaping—I won't—I won't be like the creek though—that for all its strength and fuss and fury just fades away at last into nothing, out there in the desert. I want to keep on going and going and going—I don't know where. I don't care where, just on, and on, and on!"

She sprang to her feet and stood before him in all the radiant, vigorous beauty of her young womanhood, and with reckless abandon challenged:

"Jimmy, let's run away. Let's go away off somewhere beyond the farthest line yonder that you are always looking at; and then let's keep on going, just you and I. Wouldn't it be fun if we were to be married? Why shouldn't we? You're not too old

—I'm not too young. We could live in a little house somewhere—a house with carpets, Jimmy—and books and pictures, and you could make music, and I would take care of you— Oh, such good care of you, Jimmy. I'd cook all the things you like and ought to eat, and wash for you, and mend your things, and you could go on teaching me, and scolding me when I forgot to use the right words, and—and—wouldn't it be fun, Jimmy? Of course after a while Mother Burton would come too—and perhaps there would be a place somewhere near for my daddies to prospect— Oh, Jimmy, Jimmy, let's go!"

Doctor Burton laughed, and it was well for the girl that she was still too much of a child to know how often grim tragedy wears a mask of mirth.

When the stranger had told the Pardners and their daughter his simple story—how he had been ill and could find no work in Tucson, and so had come to the Cañada del Oro with the hope of finding enough gold to live by, and Marta had ridden away to spend the Sunday with Saint Jimmy and Mother Burton, Thad said doubtfully:

"I don't see as there's much we can do. We can't learn nobody to find gold whar it ain't, an' if we knowed whar it was we certain sure would stake out some claims for ourselves, wouldn't we? I don't take no stock in there bein' anythin' more than a color mebby, round that old Dalton cabin yonder."

"Gold is where you find it," remarked Bob cheerfully. "You can't never tell when or where you're going to strike it rich."

"That's all right," retorted Thad. "But it stands to reason that if the feller what built that cabin hadn't of worked out his claim, he'd be there workin' on it yet, wouldn't he? He quit and vamoosed because he'd worked it out, I'm tellin' you."

Bob returned with energy:

"And I'm maintainin' that no claim or mine or nothin' else was ever worked out. Folks jest quit workin' on 'em, that's all. There's many and many a mine been abandoned when three hours more—or one more shot, mebby, would a-opened up a bonanza. This young man may go right up there in the creek and stick in his pick a foot from where the other feller took out his last shovel of dirt an' turn up a reg'lar glory-hole. Don't you let him give you the dumps, Mr. Edwards, he's the worst old pessimist you ever see. There's enough gold in this neighborhood to buy all the bacon an' beans you'll need, long as you live, if you're willin' to scratch around for it; an' you've got jest as good a chance as there is to strike a real mine an' make your everlastin' fortune, too."

"If you want my honest opinion, Mr. Edwards," said Thad solemnly, as if his pardner had not spoken, "you'll be a fool to spend any time here."

The younger man smiled:

"But you see, Mr. Grove, I am rather forced to

do something right now. As I told you, I'm not in a position to spend much time tramping about the country looking for what might be a better place. All my capital—all my worldly possessions, in fact—are in that pack there. After all, you know the old saying," he finished laughingly, "'It takes a fool for luck.'"

"That ain't so," growled Thad, "'cause if it was, my pardner there would be as rich as Rockefeller and Morgan an' the rest of them billionaires all rolled into one."

Bob grinned at Edwards reassuringly. Then he said to Thad:

"Now that you've got that off your mind, suppose we jest turn in an' do what we can for the boy here."

"This here's Sunday, ain't it?" returned Thad, doubtfully. "Didn't my gal tell us yesterday that we couldn't——"

"Your gal," interrupted Bob, fiercely. "Your gal—huh. I'm here to tell you that you'd best keep within your rights, Thad Grove, even if me an' you be pardners. She's my gal this week beginnin' at sun-up this mornin', an' you know it; an' besides, there's good scripture for us helpin' Mr. Edwards here to get located, even if 'tis Sunday."

"Scripture!" said Thad scornfully. "What scripture?"

"It's that there part where the Lord is linin' 'em up about what they did an' what they didn't do," explained Bob. "Says He to one bunch, 'When I was dead broke an' hungry an' thirsty an' all but

petered out, you ornary skunks wouldn't turn a hand to give me a lift, an' so you don't need to figger that you're goin' to git in on the ground floor with me now that I've struck pay dirt'—or words to that effect. An' then to the other bunch He says: 'You're all right, Pardners; come on in an' make your pile along with me, 'cause I ain't forgot how when I was a stranger you took me in. You grubstaked me when I was down and out, an' for that, all I've got now is yourn'—leastways, that's the general meanin' of it."

Whereupon Thad conceded that while it would be wrong actually to work on the day of rest, it might be safe for them to show the stranger around and sort of talk things over.

And all that day, while the two old prospectors were conducting him to the cabin that, for the following months, was to be his home, while they were showing him about the neighborhood and advising him in a general way about his work, and as they sat at the dinner which Marta had left prepared for them, Hugh Edwards felt that he was being weighed, measured, analyzed. Nor did he in any way attempt to avoid or shirk the ordeal. Fairly and squarely, with neither hesitation nor evasion, he met those keen old eyes that for so many years had searched for the precious metal that is hidden in the sands and rocks and gravel of desert wastes, and lonely cañons, and those mountain places that are far remote from the haunts of less hardy and courageous men.

They did not ask many questions about his past,

for it is not the way of such men to pry into another's past. By their code a man's personal history is his own most private affair, to be given or withheld as he himself elects. But what a man is, *that* is a matter of concern to every one who is called by circumstance to associate with him. They were not particularly interested in what this man who had given his name as Hugh Edwards *had* been. They were mightily interested in discerning what sort of a man Hugh Edwards, at that moment, was.

"Well, Pardner," said Bob, later in the afternoon when Edwards, with sincere expression of his gratitude, had left them to go to the cabin which by common consent they now called his, "what do you make of him?"

Old Thad, rubbing his bald head, answered in—for him—an unusual vein:

"He's a right likable chap, ain't he, Bob? If I'd ever had a boy of my own—that is, supposin', first, I'd ever had a wife—I think I'd like him to be jest about what I sense this lad is." Then, as if alarmed at this betrayal of what might be considered sentiment, the old prospector suddenly stiffened, and added in his usual manner: "You can't tell what he is—some sort of a sneakin' coyote, like as not, a-tryin' to pass hisself off as a harmless little cottontail. I'm for layin' low an' watchin' his smoke mighty careful."

"He'll assay purty high-grade ore, I'm a-thinkin,'" said Bob.

"Time enough to invest when said assay has been

made," retorted Thad. "It looks funny to me that a man of his eddication would be a-comin' up here in this old cañon to waste his time tryin' to do somethin' that he don't know no more about than a baby. Hard work, too; an' anybody can see he ain't never done much of that."

"He's been sick," returned Bob.

Thad grunted:

"Huh! If he was, it was a long time ago. Did you notice the weight of that pack— He's a totin' it like it warn't nothin' at all."

"He looks kind of pale when his hat is off," said Bob.

To which Thad returned:

"He's mighty perticler about where he was an' what he was doin' for a livin' before he blew into Tucson."

"As for that," returned Bob, "there's been some things happen since me an' you was first pardners that we ain't jest exactly a-wavin' in the wind— an' look at us now."

Thad's dry retort was inevitable:

"Yes, jest look at us!"

Bob chuckled.

"*You* ain't so mighty much to look at, I admit."

"Well," said Thad, "as long as my gal thinks I'm all right, you——"

"My gal—*my* gal," snapped Bob. "Why have you allus got to be a-tryin' to do me out of my rights. You know well as I do this is my week."

"Excuse me, Pard," the other apologized in all seriousness. "And that leads me to remark that

your gal didn't appear altogether indifferent an' uninterested in this young prospectin' neighbor of ours. You took notice, too, I reckon."

"I ain't blind, be I?" answered Bob. "An' why wouldn't she take notice? My gal ain't no wizened-up old mummy like me an' you. Why wouldn't she take notice of a fine, up-standin' clean-eyed, straight-limbed, fair-spoken youngster like him, heh? It's nateral enough—an' right enough too, I reckon."

Old Thad, with sudden rage, shook his long finger at his pardner and, in a voice that was high pitched and trembling with emotion, cried:

"Nateral enough, you poor old, thick-headed, ossified, wreck of manhood, you. Nateral enough! Holy Cats! It's *too* nateral, that's what I'm a meanin', it's *too* nateral—whether it's all right or all wrong—it's too almighty nateral—that's what it is."

Later, when Marta had returned to her home in the Cañon of Gold—when the sun was down and the shadow of the approaching night was deepening over desert and mesa and mountain—a cowboy on his way to the home ranch stopped to listen as the music of Saint Jimmy's flute came soft and clear through the quiet of the evening, from that spot beneath the old cedar tree, high on the mountain side. A wandering Mexican, camped near Juniper Spring below, heard and crossed himself. Natachee the Indian who was following a faint trail toward the wild upper cañon heard and smiled. Jimmy's mother heard, and her eyes filled with tears.

CHAPTER IX

"GOLD IS WHERE YOU FIND IT"

"As the ocean calls the water of the rivers, and the rivers call the creeks and springs, so this story, of a treasure hidden in a mine that is lost, has called many people to the Cañon of Gold."

THE Cañon of Gold was still in the shadow of the mountains the next morning when the Pardners went to give their new neighbor his first lesson in the work that was to occupy him for months to come.

Hugh Edwards greeted them without a trace of the hesitating fear that he had shown during the first moments of their meeting, the day before. His eyes now met theirs fairly, with no hint of questioning dread. It was as if the restful peace and strengthening quiet of that retreat which was hidden so far from the overcrowded highways of life had begun already to effect, in the troubled spirit of this stranger, a magic healing.

"Well," said Thad gruffly, "we're here—where's your pick an' shovel an' pan?"

When the younger man had produced those implements which were so new and strange to him, Bob asked kindly if he had had a good night's sleep, if he found the cabin comfortable, and if he had

fortified himself for the day's work with a proper breakfast.

Hugh Edwards laughed, and, with his face lifted to the mountain heights that towered above them, squared his shoulders and drew a long deep breath.

"I haven't had such a sleep since I can remember. As for breakfast, well, if I eat like this every day, I will exhaust my supplies before I even learn to know gold when I see it. I feel as if I could move that hill over there into the cañon."

Bob chuckled.

"You'll find you've got to move a lot of it, son, before you make enough at this gold-huntin' game to buy your grub."

"That's the trouble with prospectin' in this here Cañada del Oro country," said Thad. "The harder you work the more you eat, and the more you eat the harder you got to work. Come on, let's get a-goin'."

For several hours the old Pardners labored with their pupil beside the creek, then, with hearty assurance of further help from time to time as he made progress, they left him and went to their own little mine, some five hundred yards down the cañon.

The afternoon was nearly gone when Edwards, who was kneeling over the gravel and sand in his pan at the edge of the stream, looked up.

On a bowlder, not more than five steps from the amateur prospector, sat an Indian.

With an exclamation, the white man sprang to his feet.

The Indian did not move. Dressed as he was in the wild fashion of his fathers and with his primitive bow and arrows, he seemed more like some sculptured bit of the past than a creature of living flesh.

Hugh Edwards, standing as one ready to run at the crack of the starter's pistol, swiftly surveyed the immediate vicinity. His face was white and he was trembling with fear.

With grave interest the red man silently observed the perturbed stranger. Then, as Edwards again turned his frightened eyes toward him, the Indian raised his hand in the old-time peace sign and in a deep, musical voice spoke the one word of the old-time greeting:

"How."

Edwards broke into a short, nervous laugh.

"How-do-you-do— By George! but you gave me a start."

Some small animal—a pack rat or a ground squirrel —made a rustling sound in the bushes on the bank above, and with a low cry the frightened man wheeled, and again started as if to escape.

The Indian, watching, saw the meaning in every move the stranger made, and read every expression of his face.

With an effort Edwards controlled himself.

"Are you alone?" he asked. "I mean"—he caught himself up quickly—"that is—have you no horse?"

"I am always alone," the Indian answered calmly. Then, as if to put the other more at ease, he con-

tinued in excellent English: "Night before last, when the sun went down, I was up there on Samaniego Ridge," he pointed with singular grace. "There on that rock near the dead sahuaro, and I saw you as you came up the old road into the cañon."

Hugh Edwards again betrayed himself by the eagerness of his next question:

"Did you see any one else?"

"There was no one on your trail," returned the Indian.

At this the stranger seemed to realize suddenly that he was permitting his fears to reveal too much, and, as one will, he sought to amend his error with a half-laughing excuse.

"Really, you know, I didn't suppose there was any one following me." He indicated his work with a gesture. "I am not exactly used to this sort of life, you see, and—well—I confess the loneliness, the strangeness of my surroundings, and all, have rather got on my nerves—quite natural, I suppose."

The Indian bowed assent.

As if determined to correct any impression he might have made by his unguarded manner, Edwards abruptly dropped the subject, and with an air of enthusiastic delight spoke of his surroundings, finishing with the courteous question:

"You live in this neighborhood, do you?"

There was a quick gleam of savage light in the dark eyes that were fixed with bold pride upon the questioning white man, and the Indian answered more in the manner of his people:

"In the years that are past my fathers came to these mountains to hunt and to make war like men. They come now with the squaws to gather acorns, when the white man gives them permission. I live here, yes, as a homeless dog lives in one of your cities. My name is Natachee."

The deep, musical voice of the red man revealed such bitter feeling that Hugh Edwards was moved to pity. And then, as he stood there in the silence that had fallen upon them, a strange thing happened. It was as if the spirit of the Indian had somehow touched the inner self of the stranger and had quickened in him a kindred savage lusting for revenge upon some enemy who had brought upon him, too, humiliation and shame and suffering beyond expression. The white man's hands were clenched, his breast heaved with labored breathing, his face was black with passion, his eyes were dreadful with the scowling light of anger and hate.

A faint smile came like a swift shadow over the face of the watching Indian; then he spoke with deliberate meaning:

"And why have you come to the Cañada del Oro? Why should a man like you wish to live here, in the Cañon of Gold?"

Hugh Edwards gained control of himself with an effort.

"I came to look for gold; as you see," he said at last.

Again that faint smile like a quick shadow touched the face of the red man.

And this time the other saw it. Looking straight into the eyes of the Indian, he said coldly:

"And you, what do you do for a living?"

Natachee, returning look for look, answered simply:

"I live as my fathers lived."

"I have heard about you, I think," said Edwards.

The Indian's deep voice was charged with scorn.

"Yes, the Lizard called at your camp—you would hear about every one from the Lizard."

"He told me that you were educated."

Natachee answered sadly:

"It is true, I attended the white man's school. What I learned there made me return to the desert and the mountains to live as my fathers lived; and to die as my people must die."

When the white man, seemingly, could find no words with which to reply, the Indian spoke again.

"If it is gold that brought you here to the Cañada del Oro, why do you not search for the Lost Mine with the Iron Door?"

Hugh Edwards, remembering what the Lizard had said, smiled.

"And is there, really, such a mine?"

"There is a story of such a mine."

"Do many people come to look for it?"

Natachee answered gravely and with that dignity so characteristic of a red man, while his words, though spoken in English, were the words of an Indian:

"Too many people come. As the ocean calls the water of the rivers, and the rivers call the creeks and

springs; so this story of a treasure hidden in a mine that is lost has called many people to the Cañon of Gold. For many years they have been coming—for many years they will continue to come. The white people say they do not believe there ever was such a mine and they laugh about it. They look for it just the same. Even the Pardners, who dig for gold in their own little hole down there, laugh, but I know that they, too, believe even as they laugh. That is always the white man's way—always he is searching for the thing which he says does not exist, and at which he laughs."

"But what about you?" asked Hugh Edwards. "Do you believe in this lost mine?"

The Indian's face was a bronze mask as he answered:

"Of what importance is an Indian's belief to a white man? When the winds heed the dead leaves they toss and scatter, when the fire heeds the dry grass in its path, then will a white man heed the words of an Indian."

"Oh, I wouldn't say it was as bad as that," returned Edwards easily, and as he spoke he went to bend over his pan again. "Mine or no mine," he continued, as he examined the sand and gravel he had been washing, "I think I have some real gold here."

When there was no answer he said:

"You must know gold when you see it. Will you look at this and tell me what you think?"

Still there was no answer.

With the gold pan in his hand, the white man turned to face his visitor. The Indian had disappeared.

In amazement, Hugh Edwards stood staring at the spot where the Indian had been sitting but a moment before. Then, while his eyes searched the vicinity for some movement in the brush, he listened for a sound. Not a leaf or twig or blossom stirred—not a sound betrayed the way the red man had gone.

With an odd feeling that the whole incident of the Indian's visit was as unreal as a dream, the man had again turned his attention to the contents of his gold pan when a gay voice came from the top of the bank.

"Well, neighbor, have you struck it rich?"

Looking up, he saw Marta.

"I have struck something all right, or rather something struck me," he laughed, as she joined him beside the creek. Then he told her about the Indian.

"Yes," she said, "that was Natachee. He always comes and goes like that. Everybody says he is harmless. He and Saint Jimmy are quite good friends; but he gives me the creeps." She shrugged her shoulders. "Ugh! I always feel as if he were wishing that he could scalp every one of us."

"To tell the truth," returned Edwards, "I feel a little that way myself."

That evening as Hugh Edwards sat with the Pardners and their girl on the porch, he asked the old prospectors about the Mine with the Iron Door.

They laughed, as Natachee had said, but Edwards caught an odd note of wistfulness in their merriment. Thad answered his question, with a brave pretense of scorn:

"There's lost mines all over Arizona, son. Better stick to your pick and shovel if you want to eat reg'lar. You won't pan out so mighty much, mebby, but what you do get will be real."

"But this here Mine with the Iron Door is different some ways from all them others," said Bob.

And again Edwards caught that wistful note in the old-timer's voice.

"You mean that you believe there is such a mine?" he said.

"Holy Cats—No!" growled Thad. "We don't believe in nothin' 'til we got it where we can cash it in."

Bob was thoughtfully refilling his pipe. "They say it was made by the old padres, away back, a hundred years before any of us prospectors ever hit this country. I know one thing that you can see for yourself, easy—there's the ruins of a mighty old settlement or camp or somethin' on the side of the mountain up above the Steam Pump Ranch. They say it was there that the Papagos, what worked the mine for the priests, lived. The Papagos and the padres always was friendly, you know. The padres have got a big mission, San Xavier, down in the Papago country, right now—built somethin' like three hundred years ago, it was. I ain't never been able myself to jest figger their idea in fixin' up the mine with that iron door. Mebby it was on

account of them only workin' it by spells, like when they was needin' somethin' extra for their mission or for their church back home in Spain, where they all come from, and so wanted to shut it up when they was gone away. Then one time, the story goes along come one of these here earthquakes, and tumbled a whole blamed mountain down on top of the works. The old priests and their Papago miners figgered it out that the landslide was an act of God—Him bein' displeased with the way they was runnin' things er somethin', an' so they was scared ever even to try to dig her up again. An' so you see, after all these years, the trees and brush growed over the mountain again and the old mine got to be plumb lost for certain sure."

"An' so far as we're consarned," added the other pardner emphatically, "it's goin' to stay lost. This ain't no country for a big mine nohow. Mineralized all right, but look at the way she's all shot to pieces; busted forty ways for Sunday—ain't nothin' reg'lar nowhere, unless you was to go down a thousand or two feet, mebby, and that ain't no prospect for a poor man, I'm a-tellin' you. Find a little placer dirt, yes, and you might strike a good pocket once in a lifetime or so, but that ain't to say real minin'. Take my advice, son, and don't let this lost mine get to workin' on you or you'll go hungry."

"That's all true enough, Pardner," said Bob, "but you know how 'tis, you can't never tell—Gold is where you find it."

CHAPTER X

SUMMER

"Daddy," says she, "Hugh has changed a lot since he come to us, ain't he?"

THE weeks of the spring passed. The gleaming snow fields vanished from the dark pine heights of Mount Lemmon. The creek, which ran through the Cañon of Gold with such boisterous strength that day when the stranger came and Marta talked with Saint Jimmy under the old cedar on the mountain side, crept lazily now, with scarce a murmur, pausing often to rest in the shady quiet of an overhanging rock or to sleep, half hidden, among the roots of a giant sycamore.

The Sonora pigeon, his mission accomplished, had long since ceased to give his mating call. The nest in the mesquite thicket had been filled and was empty again. The partridge was leading her half-grown covey far from the mescal plant where they were born. The vermilion flycatcher was too busy, with his exacting parental duties, even to think of indulging in those fantastic exhibitions which ultimately had placed the burdens of fatherhood upon his shoulders.

There was not a day of those passing months that the Pardners and their girl did not in some way

come in touch with their neighbor. Sometimes Edwards would go to counsel with the two old prospectors as they worked in their little mine. Again, they would go over to his place to advise him, with their years of experience, in his small operations. Often he would spend the evening with them on the porch in neighborly fashion, or they would go to smoke with him before the door of his tiny cabin. Occasionally, it was no more than a shout of greeting across the three hundred or more yards that separated the two places; but always the contact that had been established that day when the Lizard brought the stranger to the Pardners' door was maintained.

Hugh Edwards might have gone from the place where he labored to the Pardners' mine, along the creek under the high bank, without passing their house at all, but he never did. That is, he never both went and returned by the creek route. Either going or coming, he would always climb out of the deep cut made by the stream to the level of the main floor of the cañon where the house stood—except, of course, when Marta had gone to the store at Oracle or to see Saint Jimmy and Mother Burton.

The girl was always included, too, in those evenings on the porch or before his cabin door. Always, on her way to the store, she stopped to see if she could bring anything for him. And often, with the freedom of the rude environment she had known since she could remember, and with the frank innocence of her boyish nature, Marta would run over to give him a lesson in the arts of the

kitchen; or, perhaps, to contribute something of her own cooking—a pie or cake or pudding—that would be quite beyond the range of his poor culinary skill. It was indeed all very natural—perhaps, as Thad had said that first day, it was too darned natural.

To the Pardners, Hugh Edwards was an object of continued speculative interest, a subject of endless and somewhat violent arguments; and, it must be added, a never-failing source of amusement and delight. The genuineness and depth of this friendship for their young neighbor was evidenced at last by their telling him the story of their partnership daughter as they had told it to Saint Jimmy and Mother Burton. It was not long after this mark of their confidence that the old prospectors were led into a characteristic discussion of their observations.

Hugh had gone to them at their mine with a bit of quartz which he had picked up in the bed of the creek. The consultation was over and the two old prospectors were sitting in the shade of the tunnel opening watching the younger man as he climbed up the steep bank toward the house. Old Bob was grinning.

"He sure thought he had found somethin' good this time, didn't he? The boy's all right, don't never show a sign of bein' sore when his rich rocks turn out to be jest nothin' but rock—jest keeps right on tryin'. Don't seem to care a cuss how many blanks he draws."

Thad chuckled:

"If hard work will get him anything, he's sure due to strike it rich. Hits it up from crack of day 'til plumb dark an' acts like he hated even to think of sleepin' or eatin'."

"It's funny, too," said Bob, "'cause you remember at first he didn't 'pear to take no interest a-tall. Jest poked along in a come-day, go-day, God-send-Sunday sort of a gait, as if all he wanted was to git his powder back with what frijoles, bacon, and coffee he had to have. He's sure come alive, though. I wonder——"

Thad was rubbing his bald head with a slow, speculative movement.

"Had you took notice how he allus goes up to the house when he brings them pieces of fool rock to us? My gal, she says to me the other evenin'——"

"Your gal! Your gal!" Marta's father shouted. "This here's my week, and you know it blamed well, you old love pirate, you. Can't you never be satisfied with your share? Have you got to be allus tryin' to euchre me out of my rights?"

"I apologize, Pardner, I forgot, I apologize plenty," said Thad hurriedly. "As I was meanin' to say, that gal of yourn, she says to me, 'Daddy'—last Saturday it was, so she had a right to call me daddy—'Daddy,' says she, 'Hugh has changed a lot since he come to us, ain't he?'"

"Well," returned Bob, "what if my daughter did make such a remark, it——"

"She was my daughter then," interrupted Thad sternly.

"She's mine right now," retorted Bob with equal force. "What if she did say it? I maintain it only goes to show what a smart, observin' gal she's growed up to be."

Thad grunted disgustedly.

"It's almighty plain that she didn't inherit none of her observin' powers from you."

Bob glared at him.

"Wal, what are you seein' that I ain't?" he demanded. "Somethin' that's wrong, I'll bet—By smoke! Thad, if you was to happen to get into Heaven by any hook or crook so ever, you'd set yourself first off to suspicionin' them there angels of high gradin' the gold they say the streets up there is paved with."

The other returned with withering contempt:

"You've said it! But don't it signify nothin' to you when your gal—when any gal takes notice of how a feller is lookin' different from what he did when she first met up with him? Ain't it got no meanin' for you when she says, 'Since he come to us'? *Come to us—to us*—can't you see nothin'? If I was as dumb as you be, I'd set off a stick of powder under myself to see if I couldn't get some sort of, what I heard Doctor Jimmy once call, a re-action."

Bob laughed.

"I figger on gettin' all the reactions I need from you, without wastin' any powder. Hugh did come to us, didn't he? Even if that measly Lizard did fetch him far as the gate."

"Oh, sure," grumbled the other with fine sarcasm. "Hugh, he didn't come to this here Cañada del Oro—not a-tall—he jest come to *us*."

Bob continued as if the other had not spoken:

"As far as his not bein' the same as when he come, well, he ain't—anybody can see that. 'Tain't only that he's started in to workin', all at once, like he jest naterally *had* to get rich. He's different in a lot of ways. Take his looks, for instance—he used to be kind of white like—you remember, and now he's tanned as black as any of us old desert rats. He's sturdier and heavier like, every way. Hard work agrees with him, 'pears like."

"'Tain't only that," said Thad.

"Sure—his hair ain't so short no more."

"There's more than hair an' bein' tanned," said Thad.

"Yep, there is," agreed Bob. "Do you mind how, when he first come, he acted sort of scared like—right at the very first, I mean."

"That's it," returned Thad, "his eyes was like he was expectin' one or t'other, or both of us, to throw down a gun on him. An' yet I sensed somehow, after the first minute, that it wasn't us he was afraid of. He sure walks up to a man now, though, like he could jump down his throat if he had to."

"I'll bet my pile he would, too, if he was called," chuckled Bob. "And have you noticed how easy he laughs, an' the way he sings and whistles over there when he's fussin' 'round his shack of a mornin' or evenin'?"

"He sure seems contented enough," said Thad, "an' that's another thing I've noticed, too," he added slowly. "The boy ain't been out of the cañon since he come."

"Ain't no reason for him to go," said Bob. "We take out what little gold he pans with ourn, don't we? An' it's easy for Marta to buy his supplies for him while she's buyin' for us. There ain't nobody at Oracle that he'd be wantin' to see."

"Mebby that's it," said Thad.

"Mebby what's it?" demanded Bob.

"That there ain't nobody at Oracle that he wants to see—or that he don't want to see him—whichever way you like to say it."

"There you go again," said Bob. "Can't talk more'n a minute on any subject without hintin' that somethin' is wrong. The boy is all right, I tell you."

"Well, Holy Cats! who said he wasn't?" cried Thad. "I wouldn't hold it against him much if he never went to Oracle or nowhere else; jest stuck in this here cañon 'til he died, hidin' out in the brush somewhere every time anybody strange showed up nearer than George Wheeler's. You an' me has both suffered from the same sort of sickness more'n once, or I'm a-losin' my memory. You're allus makin' out that I'm thinkin' evil when I'm only jest tryin' to look at things as they actually are. If I'd intimated that the boy was a hoss-thief or a claim-jumper or somethin' like that, you'd have reason to climb on to me, but I'm likin' him an'

believin' in him as much as ever you or anybody else ever dared to."

Bob grinned.

"It's funny how we're all agreed on that, ain't it? He is sure a likable cuss. I was a-warnin' him the other day about handlin' his powder. 'You don't want to forgit, son,' says I, 'that there's enough in one of them sticks to blow you so high that you'd think you was one of them heavenly bodies up yonder.' He laughed an' says, says he, 'That bein' the case, it would be mighty comfortin' to know there was no one to dock me for the time I was up in the air, wouldn't it?'"

"Huh!" grunted Thad, "that's an old one."

"Sure it's an old one," retorted Bob, "but nobody can't say it ain't a good one; and I'm here to maintain that you can tell a heap more about a man by the jokes he laughs at than you can by the religions he claims to believe in."

"Yes," retorted Thad grimly, "I've allus took notice, too, that them that's all the time seein' evil in whatever anybody does is dead immortal certain to be havin' a lot of their own doin's that need to be kept in the dark. As for this game of lookin' for some sort of insinuations in everything a body says, it's like a lookin' glass—what you see is mostly yourself. That's what I'm meanin'."

"Hugh is a good boy all right," said Bob.

"He's all of that and then some," said Thad.

The truth of the matter is, Hugh Edwards had found, in the Cañada del Oro, something more than

the gold for which he worked so laboriously through the long days, and which he had come to hoard with such miserly care. In the Cañon of Gold, he had found more than rugged health; more than a sanctuary from whatever it was that had driven him from the world to which he belonged into the lonely seclusion of that wild country. Into his loneliness had come a sweet companionship that had grown every day more dear. In this new joy and gladness, bitterness and pain had ceased to darken his hours with hatred and with useless and vengeful longings. Crushed and beaten, humiliated and shamed, his every hour an hour of dread, he had found inspiration and spirit to plan his life anew. Out of his hopelessness, a glorious new hope had come. He had learned again to dream; and he had gained strength to labor for his dreams.

But he had not told Marta what it was that he had found. He could not tell her yet. Before he could tell her, he must have gold. And he must have, not merely an amount that would satisfy the bare necessities of life—he must have much more than that. He was not so foolish as to feel that he must be in a position to offer this girl the extravagant luxuries of life. But his need was born of a dire necessity—a necessity as vital as the need of food. Without gold, the realization of his dream was an impossibility. His only hope of happiness was in the possibility of his success in finding a quantity of the yellow metal for which, through the centuries, so many men had labored, as he was laboring now, in

the Cañon del Oro. He could not explain to Marta —he could only dream and hope and work, as those others before him had dreamed and hoped and worked in the Cañon of Gold. And so, with a strength that was like the strength of Saint Jimmy, this man was resolutely hiding the love that had re-created him. Marta must not know—not now.

But Marta knew—knew and yet did not know. The girl, whose womanhood had developed in the peculiarly sexless environment that had been hers since she could remember, had formed no habit of self-analysis. She was wholly inexperienced in those innocent but emotionally instructive friendships which girls and young women normally have with boys and men of their own age. Except for her fathers and Saint Jimmy, she had had no contact with men. In her childlike ignorance she asked of herself no questions. She gave no more thought to the meaning of her interest in Hugh Edwards than a wild bird gives to its mating instinct. But as their friendship grew and ripened, this girl of the desert and mountains knew that she was happy as she had never been happy before. She felt a kinship with the wild life about her that thrilled her with its poignant mystery. The flowers had never before bloomed in such passionate profusion. The birds had never voiced such melodies. The very winds were freighted with perfumes that filled her with strange delight. The days, indeed, flew by on wings of sunshine—the nights were haunted with shadowy promises as vague and intangible as they were sweet.

Natachee, as the weeks passed, seemed to develop a strange interest in the man who was so obviously from a world that is far indeed from the haunts of the lonely red man. Frequently the Indian called at the little cabin to spend an hour or more. Always he appeared suddenly, at the most unexpected moments, as if he were a spirit materialized that instant from an invisible world, and always he disappeared in the same startling fashion.

Sometimes, when he was with Edwards and the Pardners, he would discuss matters of general interest with the speech and manner of any well-bred college man. Save for his savage costume, his dusky countenance, and a certain touch of poetic feeling in his choice of words and figures of speech, there would be nothing, on these occasions, to mark him as different, in any way, from his white companions. But on other occasions, when Natachee and Edwards were alone, the red man would, for the moment, cast aside every mark of his training in the schools, and, with the voice, words, and gestures peculiar to his race, express thoughts and emotions that were purely Indian. Much of the time, however, he would sit silently watching the white man at his work. Often he would come and go without a word. He would sometimes appear, too, when Marta and Edwards were together, and on these occasions, save for a courteous greeting, he was rarely more than a silent observer.

The Lizard had at first endeavored to cultivate the stranger's friendship, but, receiving no encouragement,

had soon limited his attentions to a sullen "Howdy" when he passed on his way to or from Oracle.

But Saint Jimmy had not yet met the man who was living next door to Marta. Often the girl begged her teacher to go with her to call on the new neighbor. Mother Burton frequently scolded him, gently, for his discourtesy to the stranger. And Saint Jimmy promised many times that he would call, but he invariably postponed the date of his visit. He would set out on his social mission in all good faith, but invariably, when he came within sight of the cabin so near to Marta's home, he would stop and, instead of going on, would spend the hours alone on the mountain side looking out over the desert. Had Saint Jimmy been other than the gentle spirit he was, he might have said that he heard quite enough about Hugh Edwards from Marta without going to visit him.

Many times, too, Saint Jimmy thought to tell Marta the story her fathers had intrusted to him, but for some reason he always found it as difficult to talk to his pupil about the mystery of her early childhood as he found it hard to call on this man in whom she was so interested.

Often he said to his mother that he would delay no longer—that he would tell the girl the next time she came to see them; but each time he put it off. The girl was always so radiantly happy, so overflowing with the joy of life. Perhaps, Saint Jimmy told himself, perhaps, it might never be necessary for her to know.

The dry season of the summer passed—the summer rains came; and again the desert, the foothills and mountain sides were bright with blossoms. It was during this "Little Spring," as the Indians call this second blossoming time of the year, that Saint Jimmy finally called on Hugh Edwards.

And—it was the Lizard who brought it about.

CHAPTER XI

THE LIZARD

"No," said Doctor Burton, slowly, "I have heard nothing about Mr. Edwards. Nothing wrong, I mean."

THE Lizard was on his way to Oracle that day when he turned aside from the more direct trail to take the path that led past the little white house on the mountain side. Approaching the Burton home, he pulled his horse down to a walk, and, as he rode slowly up the winding way, his shifty eyes searched the vicinity on every side. It was not long before he saw Doctor Burton, who was seated, with his back comfortably against a a rock in the shade of a Juniper tree, reading.

As the Lizard left the trail and rode toward him, Saint Jimmy glanced up from his book. With a look of mild interest, he watched as the horse with its rider climbed the steep side of the mountain.

When he had come quite near, the Lizard stopped, and slouching down in the saddle looked at the man seated on the ground with a wide grin, while the horse with a long breath of relief dropped his head and settled himself sleepily, as if understanding from long experience that his master would have no further use for him for some time to come.

"How do you do?" said Jimmy, smiling.

"'Bout as usual," returned the horseman. "I'm eatin' reg'lar. 'Lowed hit war time I rode by to see how you was a makin' hit these days. I see ye're still alive," he laughed, in his loose-mouthed way.

"I am doing very well," returned Saint Jimmy, wondering what the real object of the fellow's call might be.

"Yer maw's well too, I reckon?"

"Yes, thank you."

"Been over t' Oracle lately?"

"I was there yesterday."

"Uh–huh! I was up t' the store myself day before. Hear anythin' new, did ye?"

"Nothing startling," smiled Saint Jimmy. "Your father and mother are well, are they?"

"'Bout as usual. Ain't seed George Wheeler lately, have ye—er any of his folks?"

"George was at our house a few days ago," returned Jimmy. "Stopped in a few minutes on his way home from the upper ranch."

"Uh–huh!—George say anything, did he?"

"No. Nothing in particular."

The Lizard shifted his slouching weight in the saddle. "I met up with one of George's punchers t'other day. Bud Gordon, hit war. He says as how th' lions is a-gettin' 'bout all of George's mule colts up 'round his place above."

"So George was telling us. It's too bad. You ranchers will be planning another hunt soon, I suppose."

The Lizard shook his head solemnly, then leered at Saint Jimmy with an evil grin.

"Thar's varmints in this here neighborhood what needs a-huntin' a mighty sight more'n lions an' coyotes an' sich."

Jimmy waited.

"You say you ain't heerd nothin'?" demanded the Lizard.

"About what?"

"'Bout that there new prospector, what's located in th' old cabin down thar by th' Pardners' place."

"No," said Doctor Burton slowly. "I have heard nothing about Mr. Edwards—nothing wrong, I mean."

"Wal, if ye ain't, hit's 'cause ye ain't been 'round much, er 'cause ye ain't listened very close. Mebby, though, folks would be kind o' slow-like sayin' anythin' t' you—seein's how you'd likely be more interested 'n anybody else."

Saint Jimmy was not smiling now.

"I think you are mistaken about my interest," he said curtly. "I have no desire to listen to you or to any one else on the subject."

"Oh, ye ain't, heh?" the man on the horse returned with a sneer. "I 'lowed as how ye'd be mighty quick t' listen, seein' 's how this new feller's cut you out with th' gal, like he has."

When Saint Jimmy did not speak, the Lizard continued with virtuous indignation:

"Things was bad enough as they was, but now since this new feller's come, she's a-carryin' on past

all reason. You kin find 'em t'gether at his shack er down in th' creek whar he's a-pretendin' t' work, er out in the brush somewhar 'most any time. An' when she ain't over t' his place er out with him somewhar, he's dead certain t' be at her house. I seed them t'gether when I passed on my way up here. She's too good t' speak to me, what's been neighbor t' her ever since she come into this country, but she kin take up with this stranger quick enough."

Doctor Burton was on his feet.

"That's enough," he said sharply. "You might as well go on your way now. You have evidently said what you came to say."

"Oh, I don't know," returned the Lizard with insolent superiority. "There ain't no use in yer tryin' t' be so high an' mighty with me. She's throwd me down fer you often enough. Now that yer gettin' th' same thing, ye ought t' be a grain more friendly, 'pears t' me. As fer this other feller, he'll sure get what's a-comin' t' him, an' so will she."

Jimmy caught his breath.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that folks 're a-talkin', an' that they'll likely do more than talk this time. We've allus had our doubts about th' gal—who wouldn't have—her bein' raised by them two old mavericks like she war an' bein' named fer both an' both claimin' t' be her daddy—an' nobody knowin' a foreign thing 'bout who her real paw an' maw was, er even whether she ever had any. But folks has put up with her an' you 'cause you was supposed to' be a-teachin' her

an' cause yer Saint Jimmy." He laughed. "Saint Jimmy—mighty pretty, heh? But this new feller that's got her now—Edwards, he calls hisself—he ain't pretendin' nothin'. Him an' her, they——"

Doctor Burton started forward, his eyes were blazing and his voice rang:

"Shut up—if you open your foul mouth again, I'll drag you from that horse and choke the dirty life out of you."

The Lizard, amazed at the usually gentle-mannered Saint Jimmy, straightened himself in the saddle and caught up the reins.

"Get out!" continued the man on the ground. "Go find some filthy-minded scandalmonger like yourself to listen to your vile rot. I've had enough."

The Lizard snarled down at him:

"If you warn't a poor lunger, I'd——"

But as Saint Jimmy reached for him, he touched his horse with the spur, and the animal leaped away.

Twenty minutes later, Doctor Burton was on his way to the cabin in the cañon.

Marta was at home, sitting on the porch with her sewing, when her teacher rode down into the Cañon of Gold. She saw him as he turned aside toward the neighboring cabin, and was on the ground in time to introduce the two men.

CHAPTER XII

GHOSTS

"The Cañon of Gold is haunted by the ghosts of these disappointed ones. I, Natachee, know these things because I am an Indian."

MARTA could not have explained, even to herself, why she was so anxious to see Saint Jimmy and Hugh Edwards together. Certainly she made no effort to find an explanation.

Through the years that he had been her teacher, Saint Jimmy had come to personify, as it were, her spiritual or intellectual ideal.

Any why not, since it was Saint Jimmy who had helped her form her spiritual and intellectual ideals? Their daily association, their friendship, their love—for she did love Saint Jimmy—had all been grounded and developed in an atmosphere of books and study that was purely Platonic. In her teacher she had come to see embodied the essential truths which he had taught. She had never for a moment thought of Doctor Burton and herself as a man and a woman. He was simply Saint Jimmy. She was his grateful pupil who loved him dearly because he was Saint Jimmy.

But from the very first moment of their meeting Marta was conscious that the appeal of Hugh Ed-

wards' personality was an appeal that to her was new and strange—she was conscious that he had made an impression upon her such as no man had ever before made. For that matter, she had never before met such a man. As she had said so many times, he made her think of Saint Jimmy and yet he was different. And because the experience was so foreign to anything that she had ever known, she did not understand.

Because Hugh Edwards made her think so often of Saint Jimmy, and because he was so different from Saint Jimmy, she was anxious to see the two men together. Nor could the girl understand her teacher's persistent failure to call on their new neighbor. It was not at all like Saint Jimmy. Nothing, perhaps, revealed quite so fully Marta's lack of experience in such things as her failure to understand why Saint Jimmy was so slow in making the acquaintance of Hugh Edwards.

And now at last her wish to see these two men together was gratified. The girl's radiant face revealed her excitement. Her voice was jubilant, her laughter rang out with delicious abandon. She was tingling with animation and lively interest. Her two friends could no more resist the impulse to laugh with her than one could refrain from smiling at the glee of a winsome child.

As they shook hands she watched them, looking from one to the other with an expression of such eager, anxious inquiry on her glowing countenance that the men were just a little embarrassed.

"I really should have come to see you long ago," said Saint Jimmy. "The right sort of neighbors are not so plentiful in the Cañada del Oro that we can afford to neglect them. I have heard so much about you, though, that I feel as if you were really an old-timer whom I have known for years."

He looked smilingly at Marta.

Hugh Edwards did not appear at all displeased at the suggestion that the girl had been talking about him.

"And I," he returned with an equally significant glance at Marta, "have heard so much about Doctor Burton that if there was ever a time when I didn't know him I have forgotten it."

Marta was delighted. She could not mistake the fact that the two men, as it sometimes happens, liked each other instantly. They seemed to know and understand each other instinctively. The truth is that the men themselves were just a little relieved to find this to be the fact.

Doctor Burton saw in Marta's neighbor a man of more than ordinary personality. That one of such character and education should choose to live as Edwards was living, amid surroundings so foreign to the environment in which he had so evidently been born and reared, and should be content to occupy himself with such menial labor, was to Saint Jimmy a puzzling thing. But Saint Jimmy was too broad in his sympathies—too big in his understanding of life to be suspicious of everything that puzzled him. It would, indeed, have been difficult for any

healthy-minded, clean-thinking person to be suspicious of Hugh Edwards.

And Hugh Edwards recognized instantly in Marta's teacher that quality which led all men, except such poor characterless creatures as the Lizard, to speak in his presence with instinctive gentleness and deference.

When they were seated in the shade of the cabin and the two men, who were to her so like and yet so unlike, were exchanging the usual small talk with which all friendships, however close and enduring, commonly begin, Marta watched and listened.

She was right, she thought proudly; they were alike, and yet they were different. What was it? Too frank to dissemble, too untrained in such things to deceive, too natural and innocent to hide her interest, she compared, contrasted, analyzed. But while she was seeking an answer to the thing that puzzled her, there was in her mind and heart not the faintest shadow of a suggestion that she was choosing.

There was no occasion for choice. Indeed, she was not in reality thinking—she was feeling.

And the men, while more apt in hiding their emotions, were scarcely less conscious of the situation.

Suddenly Doctor Burton saw the girl's face change. She was looking past them as they sat facing her, toward the corner of the cabin. Her expression of eager animation vanished and in its stead came a look of almost fear. In the same instant, Jimmy was conscious that Edwards, too, had noticed the

girl's change of countenance, and that a quick shadow of dread and apprehension had fallen upon him. The two men turned quickly.

Natachee was standing at the corner of the cabin.

For a long moment no one spoke. Then with a suggestion of a smile, as if for some reason he was pleased with the situation, the Indian raised his hand and uttered his customary word of greeting: "How."

They returned his salutation and he came forward to accept the chair offered by Edwards. And though his dress, as usual, was that of a primitive savage, his manner, at the moment, was in no way different from the bearing of any white man with a background of educational and social advantages. As he seated himself, he smiled again, as if finding these three people together gave him a peculiar satisfaction.

Doctor Burton spoke with the easy familiarity of an old friend:

"Natachee, why on earth can't you act more like a human being and less like a disembodied spirit? You always come and go as silently as a ghost."

"I am as God made me," the Indian returned lightly, then he added with mocking deference to the three white people: "Except for a few improvements added by your civilization. It is odd, is it not," he continued, "how the noble red man of your so highly civilized writers and painters and uplifters of various sorts becomes so often an ignoble

vagabond once you have subjected him to those same civilizing influences?"

"Certainly no one would accuse you of having acquired too much civilization," retorted Jimmy.

"I hope not, I am sure," returned the Indian quietly. Then turning to the others, he said graciously, "You will pardon us for this little exchange of compliments. We are not really being rude to each other, just friendly, that is all. With me, Saint Jimmy always drops his mask of saintliness and becomes a savage, and I cease being a savage and become, if not a saint, at least an imitator of the white man's virtues. It is the privilege of our friendship."

"You are an old fraud," declared Saint Jimmy.

"You flatter me," returned Natachee. "My white teachers would be proud of the honor you confer. They tried so hard, you know, to educate me."

Edwards was amazed. He had never before heard Natachee talk in this bantering vein. With him the Indian had always spoken gravely. He had seldom smiled and had never laughed. The white man felt, too, that underlying the playfulness of the Indian's words and the seeming pleasant humor of his mood, there was a savage interest—a cruel certainty in the final outcome of some game in which he was taking a grim part. He seemed to be playing as a cat plays with the victim of its brutal and superior cunning.

While Edwards was thinking these things and

watching the red man with an odd feeling of dread which made him recall Marta's saying that the Indian always gave her the creeps, Natachee addressed the girl with grave courtesy:

"It is really time that your teacher called upon your good neighbor, isn't it? I was beginning to fear that our Saint was harboring some hidden grievance that provoked him to forget the social obligations of his exalted position."

Marta made no reply save a nervous laugh of embarrassment.

Doctor Burton flushed and said hurriedly:

"I was just asking Mr. Edwards, Natachee, when you materialized so unexpectedly, how he liked liv ng in the Cañada del Oro."

"And I was about to reply," said Edwards with enthusiasm, "that it is the most beautiful, the most wonderfully satisfying place, I have ever known."

The Indian smiled, and his dark eyes glanced from Marta to Saint Jimmy, as he said:

"Our cañon is being very good to Mr. Edwards, I think. It is giving him health, gold enough for the necessities of life, and that peace which passeth all understanding, with the possibility of acquiring great wealth. It delights him with the beauty and the grandeur of nature. It bestows upon him the blessings of a charming and delightful companionship. And last, but not least, it affords him a sanctuary from his enemies—if he has any. What more could any man ask of any place?"

Hugh Edwards moved uneasily.

The expression of Marta's face was that of a wondering, half-frightened child.

Saint Jimmy looked at the Indian intently, as if he, too, had caught the feeling of a hidden, sinister meaning beneath the red man's courteous manner and half-jesting words.

"Natachee," he said slowly, "I have often wondered—just what does the Cañada del Oro mean to you?"

At the Doctor's simple question or, perhaps, at the tone of his voice, the countenance of the Indian suddenly became as cold and impassive as a face of iron. Sitting there before them, clothed in the wild dress of his savage ancestors, with his dark features framed in the jet-black hair with that single drooping feather, he seemed, all at once, to have thrown off every vestige of his contact with the schools of civilization. When he had been speaking in the manner of a white man, there had been something pathetic in his appearance. Only his native dignity had saved him from being ridiculous. But now he was the living spirit of the untamed deserts and mountains that on every side shut in the Cañon of Gold. His dark eyes, filled with the brooding memories of a vanishing race, turned slowly from face to face.

The three white people waited, with a strange feeling of uneasiness, for him to speak.

"You say that I, Natachee, come and go as a ghost. Well, perhaps I am a ghost. Why not?

It would not be held beyond the belief of some of your philosophers that the spirit of one who once, long ago, dwelt amid these scenes, should return again in this body that you call me, Natachee the Indian. The Cañada del Oro is peopled with ghosts. Those who, in the years that are gone, lived here in the Cañon of Gold were as the blossoms on the mountain sides in spring. In the summer months when there was no rain, the blossoms disappeared. Then the rains came—the 'Little Spring' is here—and look, the flowers are everywhere.

"In this Cañon from the desert below to the pines above, there are holes by the thousands where men have dug for gold. Climb the mountains and go among the cliffs and crags and there are more and more of these holes that were made by those who sought the yellow wealth. Walk the ridges and make your way into the hidden ravines and gorges—everywhere you will find them—these holes that men have dug in their search for treasure. And every hole—every stroke of a pick—every shovel of dirt—every pan of gravel—was a dream that did not come true; a hope that was not fulfilled.

"The Cañon of Gold is haunted by the ghosts of these disappointed ones. They are the shadows that move upon the mountain sides when the sun is down and the timid stars creep forth in the lonely sky. They are the lights that come and go in the cañon depths when the frightened moon tries to hide in the pines of Mount Lemmon. They are the voices that we hear in the nighttime, whispering,

murmuring, moaning. Weary spirits that cannot rest, troubled souls that find no peace—the disappointed ones.

"And you who dare to dream and hope and labor here in the Cañon of Gold to-day as those thousands who dared to dream and hope and labor here before you—what are you but living ghosts among these restless spirits of the dead? What are you to-day but shadows among the shades of yesterday?

"You, Doctor Burton, are only a memory of dreams that did not come true. You, Mr. Edwards, are but the ghost of the man you once planned to be. You, Miss Hillgrove, are but the living embodiment of hopes that were never fulfilled.

"As the shadow of an eagle passes, you came and you shall go. As the trail of the eagle in the air so shall your dreams, your hopes and your labor, be.

"I, Natachee, know these things. But because I am an Indian, I dream no dreams—I have no hopes." He arose and for a moment stood silent before them. Then he said: "Natachee the Indian lives among the ghosts in the Cañon of Gold."

Before they could speak, he was gone; as silently as he had come he disappeared around the corner of the cabin.

The two men and the girl sat as if under a spell and in the heart of each there was a strange sadness and a shadow of fear.

As Doctor Burton made his way homeward, he

wished more than ever that he had told Marta the things that the Pardners had related to him.

Ever since that day when she had first talked to him of the stranger, Saint Jimmy had watched carefully the girl's growing interest in her new neighbor. And, while Marta herself had been wholly unconscious of the true meaning of those emotions which so disturbed her, her teacher had understood that the womanhood of his child pupil was beginning to assert itself. He was too wise not to know also that the time was approaching when Marta herself would understand.

Through all her girlhood she had been no more conscious of herself than were the wild creatures that she knew so much better than she knew her own humankind. She had lived and accepted life without a thought of the part that, as a woman, she would some day be called upon to play in it. Because of this freedom from self, she had not been deeply concerned about the beginnings of her life. But with the arousing of those instincts that were to her so strange would come inevitably a tremendous quickening of her interest in herself. This new and vital interest in herself would as surely force her to inquire with determined and fearful persistency into her past. Who was she? Who were her parents? Under what circumstances was she born?

Doctor Burton knew the fine pride and the sensitive nature of his pupil too well not to realize that, when the time did come for the girl to ask these

questions, her happiness might well depend upon the answers.

The Lizard's loose-mouthed gossip had brought him suddenly face to face with a situation which was to his mind filled with real danger to Marta's future. His meeting with Hugh Edwards, his quick observation of the comradeship that had developed between Marta and her neighbor, the uneasy forebodings aroused by the Indian's words, all combined now to make him resolve that, at any cost to himself, he no longer would put off telling the girl what she ought to know. If Hugh Edwards were not the type of man he was, or if Marta were not the kind of girl she was, it would not, perhaps, make so much difference. To-morrow Marta was going to Oracle. She would stop at the little white house on the mountain side on her way home. Saint Jimmy promised himself that he would surely tell her then.

CHAPTER XIII

THE AWAKENING

She understood now why the old prospectors had never talked to her of her parents or told her how she happened to be their partnership daughter.

MARTA began that day with such buoyant happiness that even her fathers, accustomed as they were to her habitually joyous nature, commented on it.

The air was tingling with the fresh and vigorous sweetness of the early morning. From the kitchen door, as she prepared breakfast, she saw the mountain tops, golden in the first waves of the sunshine flood that a few hours later would fill the sky from rim to rim and cover the earth from horizon to horizon with its dazzling beauty. From some shelf on the cañon wall, a cañon wren loosed a flood of joyous silvery music, gracing his song with runs and flourishes, rich and vibrant, as if the very spirit of the hour was in his melody, and while the cañon echoed and reëchoed to the wondrous, ringing music of the tiny minstrel and the girl, with happy eyes and smiling lips, listened, she saw a thin column of smoke rise from that neighboring cabin and knew that her neighbor, too, was beginning his day.

Like the puff of air that stirred the yellow blossom

of the whispering bells beside the creek, the thought came: Was he enjoying with her the beauty and the sweetness of the morning? Was he sharing her happiness in the new day? Then, as she watched, Hugh appeared in the cabin doorway with a bucket in his hand. He was going for water to make his coffee. She saw him pause and look toward her, and her face was radiant with gladness as her voice rang out in merry greeting.

All that forenoon she went about her household work with a singing heart. When the midday meal was over, her fathers saddled Nugget and, as soon as she had washed the dishes, she set out for Oracle to purchase some needed supplies.

When the girl stopped at his cabin, as she always did, to ask if she could bring anything for him from the store, Edwards thought she had never looked so radiantly beautiful. Glowing with the color of her superb health and rich vitality—animated and eager with the fervor of her joyous spirit—she was so alluring that the man was sorely tempted to say to her those things that he had sternly forbidden himself even to think. Lest his eyes betray the feeling he had sentenced himself to suppress, he made pretext of giving some small attention to her horse's bridle, so that from the saddle she could not see his face.

As she rode on up the trail, he stood there watching her. When she had passed from sight around a sharp angle of the cañon wall, he went slowly to the place where through the long days he labored in his

search for the grains of yellow metal that had come to mean so much more to him than mere daily bread.

Where the trail to the little white house on the hill branches off from the main road to Oracle, Marta checked her horse. She wanted to go to Saint Jimmy and Mother Burton. She wanted them to know and share her happiness. She wanted to tell them how grateful she was for their love—for all that they had done to save her from the ignorant, undisciplined and dangerously impulsive creature she would have been but for their patient teaching. In the fullness of her heart she told herself that without Saint Jimmy and his mother she could never have known the joy and gladness that had come to her. Without conscious reasoning, she realized that it was their teaching, their love, their understanding of her needs, that had fitted her for that time of her awakening to the glad call of those deeper emotions that now moved her young womanhood. But above Mount Lemmon and back of Rice Peak, huge cumulus clouds were rolling up, and the girl knew that she must continue on the more direct way if she would finish her errand at the store and return before the storm that might come later in the day. On her way back, she could stop at the Burtons, for then, if the storm came, it would not so much matter.

Through narrow, rocky ravines and tree-shaded draws and sandy washes, up the steep sides of mountain spurs and along the ridges, Nugget carried

her, out of the Cañon of Gold to the higher levels. And everywhere about her as she rode, the mountain sides were bright with the blossoms of the "Little Spring." Sego lilies and sulphur flowers, wild buckwheat, thistle poppies and bee plant, and, most exquisitely beautiful of all, perhaps, the violet-tinted blue larkspur—*Espuela del caballero*—Cavalier's spur—the early Spaniards called it.

In George Wheeler's pasture, not far from the corrals with the windmill and the water tank, she met the sturdy, red-cheeked Wheeler boys and Turquoise, one of the ranch dogs, playing Indian. From their ambush behind a granite rock, they shot at her with their make-believe guns, and charged with such savage fury and fierce war whoops that Nugget danced in quick excitement. While she was laughing with them and they were courteously opening the big gate for her, their father shouted a genial greeting from the barn, and Mrs. Wheeler from the front porch called a cheery invitation for her to stop awhile. But she answered that it looked as if it were going to rain, and that she must be home in time for supper, and rode on her way to the little mountain village.

In the wide space in front of the store, a group of saddle horses stood with heads down and hanging bridle reins, waiting with sleepy patience for their riders who were lounging on the high platform that, with steps at either end, was built across the front of the building. As she drew near, Marta recognized the Lizard. Then, as they watched her approaching,

she saw the Lizard say something to his companions, and the company of idlers broke into loud laughter. The girl's face flushed with the uncomfortable feeling that she was the victim of the fellow's uncouth wit. Two of the men arose and stood a little apart from the Lizard and his fellow loungers.

When the girl stopped her horse, a sudden hush fell over the group, and as she dismounted she was conscious that every eye was fixed upon her. With burning cheeks and every nerve in her body smarting with indignant embarrassment, the girl went quickly up the steps and into the store. As she passed them, the two cowboys who stood apart lifted their hats.

The girl was just inside the open doorway when the Lizard spoke again, and again his companions roared with unclean mirth at the vulgar jest—and this time Marta heard. She stopped as if some one had struck her. Stunned with the shock, she stood hesitating, trembling, not knowing what to do. For the first time in her life the girl was frightened and ashamed.

Two women of the village who were buying groceries regarded her coldly for a moment, then, turning their backs, whispered together. Timidly the girl went to the farther end of the room where, to hide her emotions until she could gain control of herself, she pretended an interest in the contents of a show case.

Before the laughter of the Lizard's crowd had ceased, one of the cowboys who had raised his hat

walked up to them. With an expression of unspeakable disgust and contempt upon his bronzed face, the rider looked the Lizard up and down. Those who had laughed sat motionless and silent. Slowly the man from Arkansas got to his feet.

The cowboy spoke in a low voice, as if not wishing his words to be heard in the store.

"That'll be about all from you—you stinkin' son of a polecat. Never mind yer gun," he added sharply as the Lizard's hand crept toward the leg of his chaps. "Thar ain't goin' to be no trouble—not here and now. I'm jest tellin' you this time that such remarks are out of order a heap, here in Arizona. They may be customary back where you come from, but they won't make you popular in this country—except, mebby, with varmints of your own sort."

He included the Lizard's friends in his look of cool readiness.

Not a man moved. The cowboy carefully rolled a cigarette. Calmly he lighted a match, and with the first deep inhalation of smoke, flipped the burnt bit of wood at the Lizard. To the others he said:

"I notice you hombres are thinkin' it over. You'd best keep right on thinkin'. As for you——"

He again looked the man from Arkansas up and down with slow, contemptuous eyes. Then, without another word, he deliberately turned his back upon the Lizard and his friends and walked leisurely to his horse.

As the cowboy and his companion rode away

another chorus of laughter came from the group of idlers and this time their merriment was caused, not by anything the Lizard said, but was directed at the Lizard himself.

"Better not let Steve Brodie catch you again," advised one.

"He'll sure climb your frame if he does," said another.

"Steve's a-ridin' fer the Three C now, ain't he?" asked another, seemingly anxious to change the subject.

"Uh-huh— Good man, Steve," came from another.

With an oath, the Lizard slouched away to his horse and, mounting, rode off in the direction of his home.

In the store, Marta struggled desperately to regain at least a semblance of composure.

The two women, when they had made their purchases, were in no haste to go, and, under the pretext of taking advantage of their meeting for a friendly chat, furtively watched the Pardners' girl.

Marta, pretending to examine some dress goods displayed on a table behind the stove, tried to hide herself. When the kindly clerk came to wait on her she started and blushed. Trembling and confused, she could not remember what it was that she had come to buy.

The clerk looked at her curiously. The women whispered again and tittered.

At last, in desperation, the girl stammered that

she did not want anything—that she must go—that she would come in again before she started home. With downcast eyes and burning cheeks, she fled.

As she passed the men on the platform and walked swiftly to her horse she kept her eyes on the ground. She was so weak that she could scarcely raise herself to the saddle.

But the men were not watching her now. With their faces turned away they were, with one accord, interested in something that held their gaze in another direction.

Perplexed and troubled, Marta made her way slowly back toward the cañon. When Nugget, thinking quite likely of his supper, or perhaps observing the dark storm clouds that now hid the mountain tops, would have broken into a swifter pace, she pulled him down to a walk. Annoyed at the unusual restraint, the little horse fretted, tossed his head, and tugged at the bit. But she would not let him go. The girl wanted to think. She felt that she *must* think.

What was the meaning of that incident at the store? Why did those men laugh in just that way when they first saw her? Why had they watched her like that when she dismounted? Why had they looked at her so as she passed them? Why did those women refuse to speak to her?—they knew her. And what had they whispered after turning their backs upon her? She had never before been conscious of anything like this. All her life she had

met rough men. She had not been unaccustomed to rude jests. She had been, in the presence of men, like a young boy—unconscious of her sex. The only close association with men she had ever known was with Saint Jimmy and her fathers—until Edwards came. It could not be that these people were any different to-day than on other days when she had gone to the store. It must be that she herself was different.

"Yes," she told herself at last, "she *was* different."

Just as she had found a deeper happiness than she had ever before known, she had found a new consciousness—a new capacity for feeling—that had made her blush when the men looked at her—that had made her ashamed when she had heard the Lizard's jest.

And then her mind went back to consider things which she had always accepted as a matter of course, without question or particular thought—as she had accepted her two fathers.

Why had she never been invited to the parties and dances at Oracle? Why was it that, except for Mother Burton and good Mrs. Wheeler, she had no women friends? Only men had attempted to be friendly with her, and they had approached her only when she met them by chance, alone. She knew them all—they all knew her. Suddenly she remembered how Saint Jimmy had warned her once—long before Hugh Edwards had come to the Cañada del Oro:

"You must be always very careful in your friend-

ships, dear. Before you permit an acquaintance with any man to develop into anything like intimacy, you must know about his past. And by past, I mean parentage—family—ancestors, as well as his own personal record. For let me tell you that no one can escape these things. We are all what the past has made us."

The inevitable question came in a flash. What was her own past—her parentage—her family? The conclusion came as quickly. She understood now why the old prospectors had never talked to her of her own parents, nor told her how she happened to be their partnership daughter. She understood now the significance of her name, Hillgrove—her two fathers had given her their names because she had no name of her own. Nothing else could so clearly explain the attitude of the people which had been so forcefully impressed upon her by her new consciousness.

Just as the young woman reached this point in her reasoning, her horse stopped of his own volition. The girl had been so engrossed with her thoughts that she had not seen the Lizard ride from behind a thick screen of low cedars beside the trail and check his horse directly across the path. She was not at all frightened when she looked up and saw him waiting there, barring her way. Indeed, she regarded the fellow with a new interest. It was as if one factor in her sad problem had suddenly presented itself in a very definite and tangible form.

"Well," she said at last, "what do *you* want?"

The Lizard's wide-mouthed, leering grin was not in the least reassuring.

"I knowed ye'd be a-comin' along directly," he said, "an' 'lowed we'd ride t'gether."

"But what if I do not care to ride with you?" she returned curiously.

"Oh, that ain't a-botherin' me none. I ain't noways thin-skinned," he returned, reining his horse aside from the trail to make room for her. "Come along—ye might as well be sociable like. I know I can't make much of a-showin' in eddication an' fine school talk like you been used to, but I'm jist as good as that lunger Saint Jimmy, er that there fancy neighbor of yourn any day."

Something in the fellow's face, or some quality in his tone, brought the blood to Marta's cheeks.

"Thank you," she said curtly, "but I prefer to ride alone."

She lifted the bridle rein and Nugget started forward.

But the Lizard again pulled his mount across the trail and the man's ratlike face was twisted now, with sudden rage.

"Oh, you do, do you? Wall, let me tell you I've stood all I'm a-goin' t' stand on your account to-day."

"Why, what do you mean?" she demanded, amazed.

"Never you mind what I mean, my lady. You jist listen to what I got t' say. You've been a-playin' th' high an' mighty with me long enough. D' ye think I don't know what you are? D' ye think I

don't know all about your carryin' on. My Gawd a'mighty, hit's a disgrace t' any decent neighborhood. A pretty one you are t' be a-puttin' on airs with me. Why, you poor little fool, everybody knows what you are. Who's yer father? Who's yer mother? Decent people has got decent folks, an' you—you ain't got none. You ain't even got a name of yer own—Hillgrove—two fathers. Yer jist low-down trash an' nobody that's decent won't have nothin' t' do with you. You prefer t' ride alone, do you? All right, my fine lady, you needn't worry none, you're goin' t' ride alone all right. I wouldn't be seen within a mile of you."

With the last brutal word, he whirled his horse about and set off down the trail as fast as the animal could run.

The girl, with her head bowed low over the saddle-horn, sat very still. Her trembling fingers nervously twisted a lock of Nugget's mane. Here was confirmation, indeed, of all the doubts and fears to which she had been led by her own painful thoughts. Here was the answer to all her questions. Here at last was the explanation of those emotions which were to her so new and strange.

CHAPTER XIV

THE STORM

"There ain't a God almighty thing that we can do 'til th' mornin.'."

THE old Pardners, when their day's work was finished, climbed slowly down from the mouth of the tunnel to the creek and, crossing the little stream, climbed as slowly up to the level above. As his head and shoulders came above the top of the steep bank, Thad, who was in the lead, stopped.

"What's the matter?" called Bob, who was close behind in the narrow path with his head on a level with his pardner's feet. "Gittin' so old you can't make the grade without takin' a rest, be you?"

"Whar's the little pinto hoss?" demanded Thad in an injured tone, as if the absence of Nugget was a personal grievance.

Bob climbed to his pardner's side.

"Looks like Marta ain't back yet."

"She ought to be," said Thad with an anxious eye on the threatening clouds that now hung dark and heavy over the upper cañon.

"Stopped at Saint Jimmy's, I reckon," returned Bob, who was also studying the angry sky. "Goin' to storm some, ain't it?"

"The gal sure can't miss seein' that," returned the other, "an' she ought to know that when we do get a storm this time of the year, it's always a buster. I wish she was home."

"Mebby she's over to Edwards'," said Bob hopefully.

They went on toward the house until they gained an unobstructed view of the neighboring cabin and premises.

"Her hoss ain't there neither," said Thad, and again he looked up at the dark, rolling clouds.

"Oh, she'll be comin' along in a minute or two," offered Bob soothingly, but his voice betrayed the anxiety his words were meant to hide.

Marta was no novice in the mountains, and the old Pardners knew that it was not like their girl to ignore the near approach of a storm that would in a few moments change the murmuring cañon creek into a wild, roaring flood that no living horse could ford or swim. The trail, on its course from her home to the Burtons, and to Oracle, crossed and recrossed the creek many times, and should the storm break in the upper cañon at the right moment, it would easily be possible for the girl to be trapped at some point between the cañon walls and the bends of the stream, and forced to spend at least the night there. More than this, there was a place where the trail followed for some distance up the narrow, sandy bed of the creek itself, between sheer cliffs. The Pardners and Marta had more than once seen a rolling, plunging, raging wall of water

come thundering down the cañon from a storm above, with a mad force that no power on earth could check or face, and with a swiftness that no horse could outrun.

A few scattered drops of rain came pattering down. The Pardners without another word hurried over to Edwards' cabin.

The younger man, who was coming up the path from his work, greeted them with a cheery, "Hello, neighbors—looks like we're going to have a shower." Then as he came closer and saw their faces, his own countenance changed and the old look of fear came into his eyes. "Why, what's the matter—what has happened?" He glanced quickly around, as if half expecting to see some one else near-by.

"Marta ain't come home," said Thad.

And in the same instant Bob asked:

"Did she say anythin' to you about bein' specially late gettin' back to-day?"

Edwards drew a long breath of relief.

"No, she said nothing to me about her plans. But really, there is no cause for worry, is there? She always stops at the Burtons' with the mail on her way back, you know. Perhaps she stayed longer than she realized. Come on in out of the wet," he added, as the pattering drops of rain grew more plentiful. "She will be along presently, I am sure."

With a glance at the fast-approaching storm, Thad said quickly:

"You don't understand, son, we ain't worried

about the gal gettin' wet." And then in a few words he explained the grave possibilities of the situation. "If she stops at Saint Jimmy's, it'll be all right, but if she's a-tryin' to make it home and gets caught in the cañon——"

A gust of wind and a swirling dash of rain punctuated his words.

Old Bob started for the cañon trail. The others followed at his heels. When they reached the narrow road a short distance away they halted for a second.

"There's fresh hoss tracks," said Bob. "Somebody's been ridin' this way. 'Tain't the pinto, though."

"It's the Lizard probably," said Edwards. "I saw him pass on his way up the cañon this forenoon."

Half running, they hurried on. Before they reached the first turn in the cañon, a fierce downpour drenched them to the skin. The falling flood of water, driven by the blast that swept down from the mountain heights and swirled around the cliffs and angles of the cañon walls, hissed and roared with fury.

"There goes any chance of strikin' her trail," shouted Thad grimly.

The three men bent their heads and broke into a run.

At the beginning of that stretch of the trail which follows the bed of the creek, Bob stopped abruptly.

"Look here," he said to the others, "we've got to

use some sense an' go at this thing right. If we all of us go ahead like this, we'll all be caught on t'other side of the creek when the rise gets here. If she ain't already in the cañon, she might be at Saint Jimmy s, and she might not. There's a chance that the gal got started home from the store late an' was afraid to try comin' this way, and so left Oracle by the Tucson highway, figurin' to cut across the hills somewheres to the old cañon road an' try crossin' the creek lower down, like we do sometimes. It'll be plumb dark pretty quick an' if she ain't at Saint Jimmy's, there ought to two of us cover both trails—the one by Burtons' an' the one that goes direct, an' there ought to one of us stay on this side of the creek in case she has made it the other way 'round. You won't be much good nohow, son," he continued to Edwards, "if it comes to huntin' the hills out, 'cause you don't know the country like we do. Suppose you go back down to the lower crossin' where the old road comes into the cañon, you know—the way you come. If she don't show up there in another hour or two, you'll know she didn't go that way. There ain't another thing that you can do 'til daylight."

"You men know best," said Edwards and turned to go.

Thad caught the younger man by the arm.

"Wait." For a second he paused, then spoke slowly: "It might not be a bad idea while you're down that way to drop in on the Lizard."

"Come on," cried Bob. "We sure got to run for it if we beat the rise into this cut."

The Pardners disappeared in the gray, swirling downpour. Edwards, with a new fear in his heart, ran with all his strength down the cañon. But it was not alone the thought of the coming flood that made his heart sink with sickening dread—it was the memory of the Lizard's face that day when the fellow had first told him of Marta.

By the time he reached the cabin, Hugh heard the roaring thunder of the flood. For an instant he paused. Had the two old prospectors gained the higher ground beyond the stretch of trail in the creek bottom in time? He turned as if to go back, then came the thought he could not now retrace his steps beyond the first crossing. Whether the Pardners were safe or were caught by the flood, it was too late now for human aid to reach them.

Again he hurried on down the cañon. When he came to the place where he had made his camp that first night in the Cañon of Gold, it was almost dark, but over the spot where he had built his fire and spread his blanket bed he could see a leaping, racing torrent that filled the channel of the creek from bank to bank.

For nearly three hours he waited where the old road crossed the stream. Convinced at last that Marta had not come that way, he went on down the cañon, to the adobe house where the Lizard lived with his parents.

It was late now but there was a light in the window. The dogs filled the night with their clamor as he

approached and he stopped at the dilapidated gate to shout:

"Hello—Hello!"

The door opened and a long lane of light cut through the darkness. The Lizard's voice followed the light:

"Hello yourself—what do you want—who be you?"

"I'm Edwards from up the cañon—call off your dogs, will you?"

From the gate, he could see the fellow in the doorway turn to consult with some one inside. Then the Lizard called to the dogs and shouted:

"Come on in, neighbor. Little late fer you t' be out, ain't it?" he added as Edwards approached, then: "Who you got with you?"

"There is no one with me," returned Edwards as he paused in the light before the door.

"Come in—yer welcome—come right in an' set by the fire. Yer some wet, I reckon." As the Lizard spoke, he drew aside from the doorway and as Edwards entered he saw the man place a rifle, which he had held, against the wall.

An old woman sat beside the open fire smoking a cob pipe. The Lizard's father stood with his back to the wall at the far end of the room. They greeted the visitor with a brief, "Howdy." The Lizard offered a broken-backed chair.

"Thank you," said Edwards, "but I can't stop to sit down. I came to ask if you have seen Miss Hillgrove this afternoon."

The Lizard and his father looked at each other. The old mother answered:

"What's the matter, come up missin', has she?"

Edwards told them in a few words.

The old woman spat in the fire and laughed.

"She's most likely out in the brush somewheres with some no-account feller like herself. Sarves her right if she gits caught by the creek. Sich triflin' hussies ought ter git drowned, I say—allus a-tryin' t' coax decent folks inter meanness. Best not waste yer time a-huntin' sich as her, young man."

Edwards spoke sharply to the Lizard, who was grinning with satisfaction.

"Did you see Miss Hillgrove this afternoon, anywhere on the trail between here and Oracle?"

The father answered in a voice shrill with vicious anger.

"Wal, an' what ef he did—who be you to be a-comin' here at this time o' the night wantin' t' know ef my boy has or hain't seed nobody?"

Hugh Edwards forced himself to speak calmly.

"I am asking a civil question which your son should be glad to answer." He again faced the Lizard. "Did you see her?"

An insolent, wide-mouthed grin was the Lizard's only reply.

The old woman by the fire looked over her shoulder.

"Tell him, boy, tell him," she croaked. "You ain't got no call to be skeered o' sich as him."

"Shucks, maw," said the son. "I ain't skeered o' nothin'. I'm jist a-havin' a little fun, that's all."

He addressed Edwards:

"You bet yer life I seed her 'bout a mile this side o' Wheeler's pasture it was. We shore had a nice little visit too. You an' that thar Saint Jimmy needn't t' think you're th' only ones."

Before Edwards could speak, the old woman cried again:

"Tell him, son—why don't ye tell him what ye said?"

The Lizard grinned.

"I shore told her enough. I'd been a-aimin' t' lay her out first chanct I got. When I got through with her, you can bet she knowed more 'bout herself than she'd ever knowed before. She shore knows now what she is an' what folks is a-thinkin' 'bout her an' her carryin' on with that there lunger an' you." His voice rose and his rat eyes glistened with triumph. "She wouldn't ride with me—Oh, no! —'prefer t' ride alone,' says she. An' I says, says I—when I'd finished a-tellin' her what she was an' how she didn't have no folks, ner name, ner nothin'—'You needn't t' worry none, there wouldn't no decent man be seen within a mile of you.' An' then I left her settin' thar like she'd been whipped."

Hugh Edwards moved a step nearer. It seemed impossible to him that any man could do a thing so vile.

"Are you in earnest?" he asked. "Did you really say such things to Miss Hillgrove?"

"I shore did," returned the Lizard proudly. "I believe in lettin' sech people know whar they stand. She's been a-playin' th' high an' mighty with me long enough."

Then Edwards struck. With every ounce of his strength behind it, the blow landed fair on the point of the Lizard's chin. The loose mouth was open at the instant, the slack jaw received the impact with no resistance. The effect was terrific. The fellow's head snapped back as if his neck were broken—he fell limp and senseless halfway across the room.

The old woman screeched to her man:

"Git him, Jole, git him!"

The Lizard's father started forward and Edwards saw a knife.

A quick leap and Hugh caught up the rifle that the Lizard had placed against the wall. Covering the man with the knife, the visitor said coolly to the woman:

"Not to-night, madam. I'm sorry to disappoint you, but he isn't going to get any one just now."

He backed to the door and opened it with his face toward them and his weapon ready.

"I will leave this gun at the gate," he said. "If you are as wise as I think you are, you will not leave this room until you are sure that I am gone."

He pulled the door shut as he backed across the threshold.

As Hugh Edwards made his way back up the cañon he reflected on what the Lizard had said.

One thing was certain, Marta had not started home by the highway. But where was she now? At Saint Jimmy's? Edwards doubted that the girl would go to her friends after such an experience. Nor did he believe that she would come directly home. He knew too well the sensitive pride that was under all the frank boyishness of her nature. No one was better fitted than he to appreciate the possible effects of the Lizard's cruelty.

Hugh Edwards knew the dreadful power of humiliation and shame. He knew the burning, withering torture of unexpected and unjust public exposure and of undeserved popular condemnation. He knew the horror and despair of innocence subjected to the unspeakable cruelty of those evil-minded gossips whose one hope is that the venomous news they spread may be true, so that they will not be deprived of their vicious pleasure. Better than any one, Hugh Edwards knew why Marta had not come home after meeting the Lizard.

Like a hunted creature, wounded and spent, this man had come, as so many had come before him, to the Cañada del Oro. He had come to the Cañon of Gold to forget and to be forgotten—and he had found Marta. In the frankness and fearlessness of her innocence, the girl had not known how to keep her love from him. And seeing her love, hungering for that love as a starving man hungers for food, as a soul in torment hungers for peace, he had resolutely forbidden himself to speak the words that would make her his.

When he had first come to the cañon, he had hoped only to find gold enough to secure the bare necessities of life. And when out of their daily companionship his love had come with such distracting power, he had been the more miserable. But when he had heard from the Pardners their story of how they found the girl, he had seen that there was no reason save his own ill-starred past why, if he could win freedom from that past, he might not claim her. That freedom—the freedom from the thing that had driven him to hide in the Cañada del Oro—the freedom to tell her his love, could only be had in the gold for which he toiled in the sand and gravel and rocks beside the cañon creek.

As men, through all the years, have sought gold for love, so he had worked in that place of broken hopes and vanished dreams. Every day when she was with him he had sternly forced himself to wait. Every night he had dreamed, in his lonely cabin, of the time when he should be free. Every morning he had gone to his work at sunrise, buoyed with the hope that before dark his pick and shovel would uncover a rich pocket of the yellow metal. Every evening at sunset, as he climbed up the steep path from the place of his labor, he had whispered to himself, "To-morrow." And now it had all come to this. With the knowledge of what the Lizard had done, and the full realization of all that might so easily result, the man's control of himself was broken. He was beside himself with anxiety. If

Marta was not safe with her friends in the little white house on the mountain side, where was she? Had the Pardners found her? Was she wandering half insane with shame and despair through the storm and darkness? Had she been caught in that plunging flood that was roaring with such wild fury down the cañon? Was her beautiful body, that had been so vivid, so radiant with life, at that moment being crushed and torn by the grinding bowlders and jagged walls of rocks? Perhaps the Pardners, too, had been met by that rushing wall of water before they could escape from the trap into which he had seen them disappear. As these thoughts crowded upon him, the man broke into a run. There must be something—something that he could do. The sense of his utter uselessness was maddening.

At the gate to Marta's home he stopped, and in the agony of his fears he shouted her name. Again and again he called, until the loneliness of the dark house and the sullen grinding, crashing roar of the creek drove him on. At the first crossing above his own cabin, the stream barred his way. Again he cried with all his might, "Marta! Marta! Thad! Bob!" But the sound of his voice was lost, beaten down, overwhelmed by the wild tumult of the plunging torrent. At last, weary and spent with his efforts, and realizing dully the foolishness of such a useless waste of his strength, he returned to Marta's home.

He did not stop at his own cabin. Something

seemed to lead him on to that house to which he had drifted months before, as a broken and battered ship drifts into a safe harbor from the storm that has left it nearly a wreck. Since the first hour of his coming, that home had been his refuge. Every morning from his own cabin door he had looked for the chimney smoke as a wretched castaway watches for a signal of hope and cheer. Every night in his loneliness he had looked for the lights as one lost in the desert looks at a guiding star. He could not bear the thought now of those dark windows and empty rooms.

As the Pardners were climbing out of the creek bed where the trail leaves the cañon for the higher levels they heard the thundering roar of the coming flood.

"Thank God, we know that won't git her anyhow," gasped old Thad. "That there run jest about winded me."

Bob, panting heavily, managed a sickly grin.

"Like as not we'll find her safe an' dry eatin' supper at Saint Jimmy's, an' ready to laugh at us for a pair of old fools gettin' ourselves so worked up over nothin'."

"Here's hopin'," returned the other. "But it's bound to be a bad night for the boy back there. Pity there won't be no way to get word to him 'til mornin'."

They could not go very fast, and it was pitch dark before they reached the little white house. But at the sight of the lighted windows they hurried as

best they could, stumbling over the loose rocks and slipping in the mud up the narrow, zigzag trail.

In less than ten minutes from the time Saint Jimmy opened the door in answer to their knock they were again starting out into the night. And this time they separated. Thad returned to the point where the path that leads by the Burton place branches off from the main trail to make his way from there on, while Bob continued on the path from the white house which joins again the main trail at Wheeler's pasture gate.

Another hour, and the storm was past. Through the ragged clouds, the stars peered timidly. But every ravine and draw and wash was a channel for a roaring freshet.

A little way from Wheeler's corral, in the pasture, Thad met his pardner coming back. He was riding and leading another horse saddled.

"She didn't start home on the highway," said Bob.

"They seen her at Wheeler's, did they?"

"Yes, George saw her himself when she was goin', an' when she come back. George, he's saddled up an' gone on into Oracle to pass the word. He'll be out with a bunch of riders at sun-up."

Thad climbed stiffly into the saddle and for some minutes the two old prospectors sat on their horses without speaking, while over their heads the wind-torn clouds swept past as if hurrying to some meeting place beyond the distant hills.

"There ain't a God almighty thing that we can do 'til th' mornin'," said Bob at last.

Slowly and in silence they rode back to the little white house on the mountain side, there to wait with Saint Jimmy and Mother Burton for the coming of the day.

The two old prospectors, who had spent the greater part of their lives amid scenes of hardship and danger and whose years had been years of disappointment and failure in their vain search for treasure of gold, had given themselves without reserve to the child that chance had so strangely placed in their keeping. Lacking the home love and the fatherhood that spurs the millions of toiling men to their tasks, and glorifies the burden of their labors, Bob and Thad had spent themselves in their love for their partnership daughter. But, because these men had been schooled in silence by the deserts and the mountains, they made no outward show of their anxiety and fear. They did not cry out in wild protest and vain regrets and idle conjectures. They did not walk the floor or wring their hands. They sat motionless in stolid silence—waiting.

Mother Burton, in the seclusion of her own room, found relief for her overwrought nerves in quiet tears and carried the burden of her anxious, aching mother-heart to the God of motherhood.

Saint Jimmy paced the floor with slow, measured steps, pausing now and then to look from the window into the night or to stand in the open doorway with his face lifted to the wind-swept sky, listening—listening for a voice in the darkness.

In Marta's home beside the roaring creek—alone

amid the dear intimate things of her daily life—the man who had been made to live again in her love waited—waited for the eternity of the night to lift from the Cañon of Gold.

CHAPTER XV

MARTA'S FLIGHT

She did not know where she was going. She did not care. What did it matter where she went?

THE victim of the Lizard's unspeakable brutality was as one dazed by an unexpected blow. Coming, as the fellow's vicious attack did, so close upon her own uneasy thoughts, it seemed to answer all her troubled questions and she accepted every cruel word as the truth.

Nugget, wondering, perhaps, why his rider remained so motionless when the other horse and rider had gone on, essayed an inquiring step or two forward. When his mistress gave no heed to his movement, he tossed his head and pulled at the slack bridle rein invitingly. "What's the matter?" he seemed to say. "Come on—why don't we go?" But still she gave no sign of life. Slowly, as if still wondering and a bit doubtful, the little horse moved on down the familiar way toward home. At the pasture gate, the pinto, without a sign from his rider, placed himself so that she could reach the latch. Mechanically she opened the gate and the knowing animal helped her close it from the other side.

But when Nugget would have taken the trail

which goes past that white house on the mountain side by which they always went home from Oracle, Marta reined him back with a sudden start. She could not go that way now. She remembered with a wave of hot shame how she had proposed to Saint Jimmy that they be married and run away somewhere—and how she had pictured their home. She understood now why he had laughed in that queer, strained way. It would have seemed funny to any man like Doctor Burton, with such a family name and birth and breeding, that a girl like her—born as she was without a name, with no right to be born at all, even—would dare to suggest such a thing.

Saint Jimmy and Mother Burton had been good to her—yes, they would be good to any one like that. They had pitied her and had wanted to help her. But of course Saint Jimmy had laughed when she asked him to marry her. She would love those dear friends always, but at the thought of ever meeting them again she shook with terror. She felt that she would die with shame.

As she rode on, the girl gave no heed to the heavy storm clouds that were massing above the upper cañon. At any other time she would have seen and would have pushed her horse to his utmost speed in a race with the coming flood. But now she was too occupied to think of the approaching danger. In fact, her thoughts of Saint Jimmy and Mother Burton were only momentary. When her horse had turned into the direct trail to the cañon, she was fighting to keep herself from thinking of the man

who lived in the cabin so close to her home. She was telling herself over and over that she must not think of him. And yet she did, and her thoughts burned like coals of fire.

Marta knew now with terrifying certainty that she loved Hugh Edwards—not, indeed, with the love that she gave Saint Jimmy and, which, until Edwards came, was the only kind of love she knew, but with that other love—the love that a woman gives to the one man she chooses above all others to be her man for all time to come, in the lives of her children—their children. Her happiness that morning had been born of the certainty that the man she had chosen wanted her. He had never spoken a word of love to her but she knew. In a thousand ways he had told her. His very efforts to keep from speaking had made her more sure in her happiness.

She had not understood. She had not even realized why she had wanted him to speak. She had only felt instinctively that she belonged to him, and that he wanted her, but that for some reason he hesitated. But now the Lizard had explained it all. She knew now that her love for Edwards was an evil love. She knew that her instinctive answer to him was a wicked thing. She knew that the emotions stirred by him were vile. She understood at last why he had not spoken the words she hungered to hear. He would never speak. He was like Saint Jimmy. The mother of Hugh Edwards' sons must not be a nameless nobody—a creature of shameful birth and evil desires—a woman upon whom

decent women turn their backs and at whom men like the Lizard laughed in scorn.

The girl was almost in sight of Hugh's cabin when, with sudden energy, she sat erect and again checked her horse. Around that next turn in the cañon wall he would be waiting. She could not go on. A barrier, invisible but mightier than any mountain wall, had fallen across her way. She was separated —shut out. She was unclean. She must not go near the one she loved.

Wheeling her horse, the girl rode away up the cañon, straight toward the storm that was gathering in the mountains above. She did not know where she was going. She did not care. What did it matter where she went? She would go anywhere but there where he was waiting.

Blindly she rode into that stretch of the trail that lies in the channel of the creek between the sheer walls. But when, at the end of the hall-like passage, her horse would have followed the trail out of the cañon, she pulled him back. The pinto fretted and tried to turn once more toward home, but she forced him to leave the trail and go on up the creek.

For some time the little horse labored through the sand and gravel or picked his way, as a mountain horse will, around bowlders and over the rocks. So that when those first few drops of rain came pattering down, the girl was already a considerable distance up the cañon. Again Nugget protested, and again she forced him on.

She had reached a point beyond where the cañon turns back toward the south when the storm broke and the rain came swirling down the mountain in torrents. The fierce downpour, driven by the heavy gusts of wind, forced her to bend low in the saddle. On every side the dense gray curtain enveloped her. Her horse broke in open rebellion. Nugget knew, if his rider had forgotten, the grave danger of their position in the creek bed, and he proceeded to take such action as would at least insure their immediate safety.

There were a few preliminary bounds, then a scrambling rush with flying gravel and rolling rocks and tearing brush, with plunging leaps and straining heavy lifts, during which the girl rider could do little more than cling to the saddle. When her horse finally consented again to the control of the bit, and stood trembling, with heaving flanks, on the steep side of the mountain, Marta had lost all sense of direction. In the terrific downpour, she could not see a hundred yards. Wrapped in the gray folds of that wind-blown curtain, every detail of the landscape save the near-by bushes was obscured beyond recognition. No familiar peak or sky-line could be seen.

Suddenly Nugget threw up his head—his ears pointed inquiringly. The girl, too, looked and listened. Then above the hiss of the rain on the rocks and bushes, and the roar of the wind along the mountain slope, she heard the thunder of the coming flood. Nearer and louder came the sound until pres-

ently that rolling crest of the flood, freighted with crushing, grinding bowlders, swept past and the gray depths of the cañon below her horse's feet were filled with the wild uproar.

Marta knew that to go back the way she had come was impossible. She realized dully that Nugget had saved both her life and his. It did not much matter, but she was glad that the little horse was not down there in the bed of the creek. They might as well go on somewhere, she thought; perhaps Nugget could find some place where he at least would be more comfortable.

Giving her horse the signal to start, she dropped the bridle rein on his neck, thus permitting him to choose his own course. With sure-footed care, the little horse picked his way along the mountain side, always climbing a little higher until finally they reached what the girl knew must be the top of a ridge or spur of the main range. Following this ridge, which led always upward but at an easy grade, the pinto moved with greater freedom. They came at last to a low gap through which Nugget went without a sign of hesitation, and again he was making his way along the steep side of the mountain.

It was nearly dark when the girl became aware that her horse was following a faint trail. She did not know when they had come into this trail. It was so faintly marked that it could scarcely be distinguished, if at all. But Nugget seemed perfectly content and confident, and because there was no

reason for doing otherwise, and because she did not care, she let the horse go the way he had chosen.

The night came swiftly down. The gray curtain deepened to black. The girl did not even try to guess where she was except that she knew she must be somewhere on one of the mountain slopes that form the upper part of Cañada del Oro—the wildest and most remote section of the Santa Catalina range.

She was exhausted with the stress of her emotions and numb with her rain-soaked clothing in the cool air of the altitude to which they had climbed. As the light failed and the black wall of the night closed in about her, she swayed, half fainting, in her saddle. Nugget stopped and the girl slipped to the ground, clinging to the saddle for support. Peering into the gloom she could barely distinguish the mass of a mountain cedar a little farther on.

Wearily she stumbled and crept forward until she could crawl beneath the low sodden branches.

The girl felt herself sinking into a thick darkness that was not the darkness of the night.

CHAPTER XVI

NATACHEE

"My gifts are only the gifts of an Indian, Miss Hillgrove; I see with the eyes of a red man, that is all."

AS consciousness returned to Marta, her first sensation was that of physical comfort. She thought that she was in her own bed at home, awakening from a dream. Slowly she opened her eyes. Instead of her own familiar room she saw the rough, unhewn rafters, the log walls, and the rude furnishings of an apartment that was strange.

Wonderingly, without moving, she looked at the unfamiliar details—at the fireplace of uncut rocks with a generous fire blazing on the hearth—the lighted lamp on the table—the rough board cupboard in the far corner—the cooking utensils hanging beside the fireplace—and at the skins of mountain lion and lynx and fox and wolf and bear that hung upon the walls. It all seemed real enough, and yet she felt that it must be a part of her dream. She would awaken presently she thought—how curious—how real it was.

She put a hand and arm out from under the covers and touched, not the familiar blankets of her own bed, but a fur robe. The effect was as if she had

come in contact with an electric wire. In the same instant she saw the sleeve of her jacket, and realized that she was not in her own bed at all, but was lying fully dressed on a rude couch—that her clothing was still wet from a storm that was not a dream storm, and that everything else was as real.

But where was she? Who had brought her to this strange place? Fully awake now, the girl made a more careful survey of the room, and this time saw hanging on a peg in the log wall near the fireplace a bow with a sheaf of arrows, and on the floor beneath a pair of moccasins.

"Natachee!"

With a shudder, as if from a sudden chill, Marta threw back the fur robe and sat up. She was not frightened. It is doubtful if Marta had ever in her life known real fear. But there was something about the Indian that always, as she had expressed it, "gave her the creeps."

Swiftly her mind reviewed the hours that had passed since she left her home to go to Oracle. Her good-by to Edwards, her happiness as she rode over the familiar trail, her meeting with the Wheeler children and their parents, the incident at the store, her troubled thoughts as she started homeward, and then, the crushing shame—the horror of the things that the Lizard had made known to her. Of her actual movements after the Lizard left her, she remembered almost nothing clearly. That part of her experience remained to her still as a dream. But that one dominant necessity which had driven her

into the storm and the night; *that* stood clear in all its naked and hideous reality. She could not, with the burning certainty of her shame, she could not see Saint Jimmy nor Hugh Edwards again.

Rising, she went to the fireplace and stood before the blaze to dry her still damp clothing. She was calmer now. The wild uncontrolled storm of her emotions had passed. With her physical exhaustion had come a sort of relief from her emotional strain. She could think now. As she stood looking down into the fire she told herself, with a degree of calmness, that she *must* think. She must plan—she must decide—what should she do?

She was standing there, with her eyes fixed on the blazing logs in the fireplace, when she became aware that she was not alone. As clearly as if she had seen it, she felt a presence in the room. She turned to look over her shoulder. Natachee stood just inside the closed door of the cabin. He had entered, opening and closing the heavy door without a sound.

As she whirled to face him, the Indian bowed with grave courtesy.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Hillgrove, I did not mean to startle you but I thought you might be sleeping."

There was nothing either in the Indian's face or in his manner to alarm her. Save for his savage dress he might have been any well-bred college or university man. Nor did the girl in the least fear him. She only felt that curious creepy feeling that she always experienced in his presence.

As if to put her more at ease, Natachee went to bring a rustic chair from the other end of the room, saying in a matter-of-fact tone:

"I have been out taking care of your little horse. He will be comfortable for the night, I think." He placed the chair before the fire and drew back. "Won't you be seated? You can dry your boots so much better."

Marta sat down and, holding her wet feet to the blaze, looked again into the ruddy flames. The Indian, standing at the other side of the room, waited, motionless as a graven image, for her to speak.

"Thank you," she said at last.

At her words, or rather at her air of utter hopelessness, a flash of cruel satisfaction gleamed for an instant in the somber eyes of the red man.

But Marta did not see.

"It is nothing," said the Indian and his deep voice gave no hint of the fire that had, for the instant, blazed in his dark impassive countenance. "It is a pleasure to be of any service." And then with a smile which again the girl did not see, he added, "I was caught in the storm myself."

Without raising her eyes Marta said wearily, as if it did not in the least matter:

"It was you who found me and brought me here?"

"I was on my way home from the cañon below when I chanced to catch a glimpse of you and your horse against the sky. Naturally I was curious to know who it was that rode in these unfrequented

mountains through such a storm and at such an hour. I managed to follow you and so found your horse. Then I found you and brought you here."

When the girl was silent he continued:

"My poor little hut is not much, I know, but it is a shelter at least, and I assure you you are as welcome as if it were the home of your dreams."

At this the girl threw up her head with a start. Staring at him with wide questioning eyes she said wonderingly:

"The home of my dreams? What do you know of my dreams?"

Natachee bowed his head.

"I beg your pardon. My choice of words was unfortunate but unintentional, I assure you. And yet," he finished with quiet dignity, "it would be difficult for any one to imagine a woman like you being without a dream home."

With a shudder the girl turned back to the fire.

Again that gleam of savage pleasure flashed in the eyes of the Indian.

"But I am forgetting," he said, "you have had nothing to eat since noon and it is now past midnight. This is a poor sort of hospitality indeed."

As he spoke he went to the cupboard and began putting dishes and food on the table.

The girl watched him curiously—his every movement was so sure, so complete and positive. There was no show of haste and yet every motion was as quick as the movements of a deer. He gave the impression of tremendous strength and energy, yet

his touch was as light as the hand of a child, and his step as noiseless as the step of that great cat, the cougar. Indeed, as he went to and fro between the table, the cupboard and the fireplace, Marta thought of a mountain lion.

"And how do you know that I have had nothing to eat since noon?" she asked presently.

Without looking up from the venison steak he was preparing, he answered:

"You went to Oracle early in the afternoon—you did not stop at the Wheeler ranch on your way back—you did not go to Saint Jimmy's—you did not go to Hugh Edwards'—you did not go home."

The girl's cheeks flushed as she persisted:

"But how do you know? Have you some supernatural gift that enables you to see what people are doing no matter where you are?"

Natachee laughed.

"My gifts are only the gifts of an Indian, Miss Hillgrove; I see with the eyes of a red man, that is all."

The girl looked again into the fire.

"I wish you did have the gift of second sight," she said, speaking half to herself.

The Indian flashed a look at her that would have startled her had she seen it.

"Why?"

"Because," she answered slowly, "because then perhaps you could tell me something that I want very much to know."

The Indian, who was behind her, smiled.

"Dinner is served," he said.

"Really I—I don't think I can eat a thing," she faltered, looking up at him.

"I know," he returned gravely, "but perhaps if you try—" he placed a chair for her and stood expectantly.

And Marta felt herself compelled to obey his unspoken will. Perhaps because of the strange effect of the Indian's personality upon her, or perhaps because she sought relief from the pain of thoughts which she could not express, the girl encouraged the red man to talk of his life in the mountains. And Natachee, as if courteously willing to serve her purpose, followed her conversational leadings with no mention of her own life in the Cañada del Oro or of her friends. Over their simple meal, of which Marta managed to partake because she felt she must, he told her of his hunting experiences and drew from his seemingly inexhaustible store of desert and mountain lore many strange and interesting things. Nor was there, in anything that he said or in his way of speaking, the slightest hint of his Indian nature.

As they left the table, and Marta resumed her seat before the fire, she said:

"But I do not understand how a man educated as you are can be satisfied to live like—" she hesitated.

"Like an Indian?" he finished for her.

"Well, yes."

There was a long moment of silence before he replied with a marked change in his voice:

"I live like an Indian because I am an Indian. Because if I would I could not be anything else."

As he spoke he came to the other side of the fireplace and seated himself on the floor and the act had for the girl the odd effect of a deliberate renunciation of the civilization which she, in her chair, seemed for the moment to personify. It was as if in answering her question he had cast off the habit of his white man's schooling; had thrown aside mask and cloak and placed before her his true self. As he sat there, in the picturesque garb of his savage fathers, with the ruddy light of the fire playing on his bronze, impassive countenance and glinting in the somber depths of his steady eyes, the young white woman looking down upon him could detect no trace of the white man's training.

"And yet," she said, "this cabin—this room—does not look like any Indian's home that I ever saw."

He answered with the native imagery of a red man:

"The cougar that has been taught to jump through a hoop at the crack of his trainer's whip is still a cougar. The eagle in a white man's cage never acquires the spirit of a dove."

"But I should think that with your education you would live among your people and teach them."

Gazing steadfastly into the fire he answered grimly:

"And what would you have me teach my people?"

"Why, teach them what you have learned—teach them how to live."

The Indian looked at her, and the girl saw something in his countenance that made her feel, all at once, very weak and helpless. She was embarrassed as if caught in some petty meanness. In her confusion she began to stammer an apology but the red man raised his hand.

"You, a white woman, shall hear an Indian. I, Natachee, will speak.

"It would be easier to number the drops of water that fell in the storm to-night than to tell the years of these mountains that look down upon the Cañada del Oro and the desert beyond. They have seen the ages pass as the cloud shadows that race across their foothills when the spring winds blow. Before the beginnings of what you white people call history they had watched many races of men rise to the fullness of their strength and pride, and fall as the flowers of the thistle poppies fall in the desert dust. In the time appointed the Indians came.

"From the peaks of these mountains Natachee the Indian can see far. From the place where the sun rises in the east, to the mountains behind which he goes down in the west, and from the farthest range that lies like a soft blue shadow in the north, to that line in the south where the desert and the sky become one, this land was the homeland of my Indian fathers. Since the God of all life placed us here it has been our home. What has the Indian to-day?

"Was there a place where the tall pines grew and the winter snows lingered long into the dry season to feed the streams where the wild creatures drink—'I want those trees, they are mine,' said the white man. And he cut them down and sold them for gold, and the naked mountains held no snows to feed the creeks; and the meadows that God made became barren wastes—lifeless. Was there a spring of water—'It is mine,' cried the white man, and he built a fence around it and made a law to punish any thirsty creature that might dare to drink without paying him. In this homeland of my fathers the wild life was as the grass on the mesas. The Indian took what he needed. It was here for all. The white man saw the antelopes in the foothills, the deer on the mountain slopes, the bear in the cañon, the sheep among the peaks, and he shouted: 'They are mine—all mine.' And every man in his white madness, for fear some brother would destroy one more wild thing than he himself could count among his spoils, killed and killed and killed; and only the buzzards profited by the slaughter. But I, Natachee, an Indian, here in this homeland of my fathers, because I dared to kill the deer from which we had our meat this evening, am a violator of the white man's laws, and subject to the white man's punishment.

"You tell me that I should teach my people how to live? By that you mean that I should teach them the ways of the white people? Is it the duty of one who has been robbed of all that was his to accept

the thief as his schoolmaster and spiritual guide? Would you say that one who had been tricked and cheated out of his birthright must adopt the principles and customs of the trickster? Could you expect one who had been humiliated and shamed and broken to set up the author of his degradation as his ideal and pattern?

"The schools of the white people taught me nothing that would cause the white people to permit me ever to make a place for myself among them as their equal. No education can ever, in the eyes of the white man, make a white man of an Indian. All kinds of animals are educated for the circus ring, and the show bench, and the vaudeville stage. If they pr ve clever enough you applaud them. You reward them for amusing you. You educate the Indian. If he be clever enough you give him a place in your social circus so long as he amuses you. But do you permit him to become one of you in your homes, your professions, your law-making, your business—no—he is no more one of you than the performing bear is one of you. Do you think that I, Natachee, do not know these things? Do you think my people do not know that, when one of their boys is put in the white man's schools, he grows up to be something that is neither a white man nor an Indian? It is because they do know, that they look upon me, Natachee, as an outcast of the tribe. Would the outcast, without place or people in the world, teach others the things that made him an outcast?

"The only thing that an Indian can teach an Indian is to die. In the day of their strength and pride my fathers in these mountains saw the smoke from the first camp fire made by a white man in the Cañada del Oro. It was a signal smoke—but no Indian then could read its meaning. We know now that it meant the time had come when the Indians, too, must go into the shadows, even as the many races that had passed before them. But my people shall not be unavenged—as the red man is going, the white man too shall go.

"The strength of the Indian was the red strength of the mountains and deserts and forests and streams. The Indian is dying because the white man stole his red strength and turned it into a white man's strength, which is yellow gold. But the white man's yellow strength is his weakness. In the golden flower of his greatness are the seeds of his decay. For gold, your people destroy the forests—tear down the mountains—dry up or poison the streams—lay waste the grass lands and bring death to all life. For gold they would rob, degrade, enslave and kill every race that is not of white blood. For gold they rob, degrade, enslave and kill their own white brothers. Even the natural mating love of their men and women they have made into a thing to buy and sell for gold. In this lust for gold their children are begotten, and born to live for gold, and of gold to perish. The very diseases that rot the white man's bones, wither his flesh, dim his eyes and turn his blood to water are diseases which he buys with his

gold. And the only heaven that his religious teachers can conceive for his celestial happiness is a place where he may forever wear a crown of gold, make music upon a harp of gold, and walk upon streets of gold. It was this gold, which is both the white man's strength and his weakness, that brought your race like a pestilence upon my people. By this same gold for which the Indian peoples have been destroyed shall the Indians be revenged; for by this gold shall the destroyers themselves, in their turn, be destroyed.

' There is nothing left for the Indian but to die. I, Natachee, have spoken."

At his closing words Marta Hillgrove caught her breath sharply.

"Nothing left but to die? And you—have you never dreamed of—" she could not speak her thought.

Again that quick light of savage pleasure flashed across the dark face of the red man.

"An Indian has no right to dream of love," he answered, "for love to an Indian means children. Why should an Indian wish to have children?"

When the girl hid her face in her hands, he continued with cruel purpose:

"Is it so hard for Marta Hillgrove to understand that there might be circumstances under which it would become a duty to deny one's self the happiness of loving? If it is there are two men who could, I am sure, make it clear to her."

For some time the Indian sat watching the white

woman as one of his ancestors might have watched an enemy undergoing the agony of torture. Then rising he said:

"Come, it is time that you were taking your rest. You have nearly reached the limit of your endurance. You will sleep there on the couch. I shall be within call. In the morning I will take you home."

He threw more wood upon the fire and turned to leave the room.

"You are very kind," said the girl, "but I cannot go home."

Natachee faced her and she saw the savage triumph that for the moment burned through the mask of stolid indifference which he habitually wore.

"Kind?" he said with cruel insolence. "Kind! And why should I, Natachee, an Indian, be kind to you, a white woman? Make no mistake, Miss Hillgrove, if I do not to-night treat you as my fathers treated the women of their enemies, it is not because I am kind. It is only because it will afford me a more enduring and keener pleasure to return you to your friends down there in the Cañon of Gold."

The girl, cowering in her chair, heard no sound when the Indian left the room.

When morning came and Natachee again appeared he was his usual stolid, courteous self. But Marta knew now what fires of bitter hatred smoldered beneath the red man's calm exterior. He made no reference to her statement that she could not go home, nor did the girl dare to repeat what she had

said. She felt that she was powerless to do other than resign herself to the will of the Indian who seemed to find a cruel satisfaction in returning her to Saint Jimmy and Hugh Edwards.

When they had eaten breakfast, Natachee brought her horse.

The cañon creek below was still a roaring torrent, impossible to cross, but the red man led her by ways known only to himself around the head of the cañon and so at last to Saint Jimmy and Mother Burton.

For the next two or three weeks Marta avoided Hugh Edwards. She saw him frequently at a distance, and when he came to spend an evening hour on the porch, but she did not go to his cabin alone and always managed that her fathers were present when she talked with him in her own home. Edwards accepted the situation understandingly, and said no word, but worked harder than ever. Neither did she spend much time with Saint Jimmy, though she went nearly every day to see Mother Burton. The girl was very gentle with the two old prospectors and with tender thoughtfulness sought to make them feel that she was their partnership girl exactly as she had been ever since she could remember. But she would not go to Oracle, so either Bob or Thad was forced to go to the store whenever it was necessary for some one to bring supplies.

Doctor Burton blamed himself bitterly for the whole affair, but the Pardners insisted that the fault was theirs.

"You can see yourself, sir," said Bob, "that if we'd raised the gal up knowin' all the time what she had to know some day, it couldn't never a-struck her like this."

And Thad added:

"The God almighty truth is that me an' my pardner was jest too darned anxious to shirk what was plain enough our duty, and so shifted the responsibility on to you. It was a mean, low-down trick an' no way fair to you, an' you jest got to see it that way. We know how you feel about not tellin' her 'cause we're feelin' that way a heap ourselves, but it ain't addin' none to our comfort to have you tryin' to shoulder the blame what belongs to us."

The two old men were so miserable that Saint Jimmy's sympathy for them lessened somewhat his own suffering, and the three agreed that the only thing they could do was, as Bob said, "to blame everybody in general and nobody in perticler and make it up to the girl the best they could."

Then came that eventful day when Sheriff Jim Burks and two of his deputies rode into the Cañada del Oro.

CHAPTER XVII

THE SHERIFF'S VISIT

"Come to think of it, it's generally a healthy proposition not to know too much about your neighbors—the ones that you like, I mean."

THE Pardners were coming from their mine to the house for the midday meal when the officers stopped at the gate.

"Howdy, Jim?" called Bob with the cheerful grin he kept for his friends. "Which one of us are you wantin' now?"

The sheriff laughed as he shook hands with the two old prospectors.

"If you'll give our horses a feed, I'll let you both off this time."

"How about yourselves?" asked Thad. "Would you fight if we was to try to force you to eat a bite?"

"I'll say we would not," returned one of the deputies, swinging from his saddle.

"I'm that holler that I'd ring if anybody was to kick me," drawled the other.

"I'll have to hear what the boss says before I commit myself," said the sheriff. "How about it, Marta?" he called to the girl who stood in the doorway. "Are you backing the offer of these two daddies of yours?"

"You know I am, Mr. Burks," she returned heartily. "You are always welcome here. I'll be ready for you in a few minutes."

While they waited Marta's call to dinner, the men exchanged news of general interest and talked together as old friends will. And Marta, in the kitchen, could hear through the open window every word as clearly as if she had been sitting with them.

Presently the sheriff made known his mission in the Cañon of Gold. "You haven't got any strangers in the neighborhood, have you?" he asked casually.

"Nope," said Bob.

"Nary a stranger," echoed Thad.

"That is," amended Bob, "not that we have seen or heard of. This here Cañada del Oro is a pretty big piece of country, Jim, an' mighty rough, as you know, an' Thad an' me we stick kinda close to our diggin'."

"Natachee been 'round lately?"

"Oh, he drops in once in a while, same as always," returned Bob. "He was here yesterday."

"Natachee would sure know if there was any one around," mused the officer. "There is nothing stirring in these mountains that Indian don't see. I'm looking for a convict who escaped from the Florence penitentiary," he continued. "The last trace we had of him he was headed this way. He came into Tucson and managed to get a sort of an outfit together and struck out for somewhere in this general direction."

At the officer's words old Thad rubbed his bald

head meditatively. Bob bent over to pick up a bit of rock which he proceeded to examine with minute care. The girl in the kitchen caught at the table for support and, faint and trembling, with white face and horror-stricken eyes, stared through the open door toward that neighboring cabin.

Then she heard Thad say:

"We sure ain't seen nothin' like a convict in these parts, Jim. When did he make his break?"

"Two weeks ago," answered the sheriff.

The color returned to the girl's face and her trembling limbs became steady. But as she turned again toward the stove where the meal for her guests was cooking, she glanced through the open window and stood as if turned to stone.

Natachee was moving with noiseless step toward the group of men outside.

Then she heard Bob's laugh.

"Talkin' about the devil, sheriff, suppose you take a look behind you."

While the officers and the Pardners were exchanging greetings with the Indian, Marta, going to the door, summoned the hungry men. They trooped into the house and Natachee, declining the invitation to join them at the table on the plea that he had eaten an early dinner, seated himself just inside the open doorway to continue his part in the general conversation.

When the sheriff had explained his mission to the Indian, Natachee, with his eyes fixed on Marta's face, confirmed the Pardners' opinion that

no stranger had recently come into the Cañon of Gold.

"That's good enough for me," said the sheriff. And then to his men: "We'll swing over into the Tortollita country this afternoon. No use wasting any more time here."

"We can just about make it over to Dale's ranch by dark," returned one of the deputies.

"We ain't due to strike no such meal as this at Dale's," said the other officer mournfully, "Dale's batchin'."

And with one accord they all smilingly expressed their appreciation of Marta's cooking and acknowledged their gratitude for her hospitality, while the girl happily assured them again of the welcome that always awaited them in her home.

For some time following this the hard-riding officers were too busy demonstrating their approval of the dinner to engage in conversation. Natachee waited.

At last the Indian spoke casually:

"You do not always succeed in finding these escaped convicts, do you, sheriff? This is a big stretch of country to cover and it's not so very far to the Mexican line. I should think a man would have a fairly good chance."

"They have more than a fair chance," returned the sheriff. "But still we get most of them. A man must have food and water, you know. If our man knows this sort of country, we can nearly always figure out about what he will do."

He put down his knife and fork and sat back in

his chair with the genial air of one who is at peace with the world.

"It's mostly the strangers that drift in from other parts that we never get," added one of the deputies. "You can't tell what they'll do, nohow. Generally they lose themselves and never show up."

Rolling a cigarette the sheriff, in a reminiscent mood, continued:

"That's right. There was one that got away from San Quentin over in California about six months ago, and we lost him clean. They traced him as far as Phœnix and notified me to be on the lookout, because it was reasonably sure that he was heading south, but that's the last anybody ever heard of him. He may show up yet—if he's not dead. We always try to keep them in mind, you know."

The Indian, watching Marta, saw the terror that came into her eyes at the sheriff's words. Quietly she drew away from the group and slipped into the adjoining room where she stood just inside the half-open door listening.

The eyes of the Pardners were fixed upon the officer with intense interest.

Natachee smiled.

"What did this man look like?"

The sheriff answered:

"The description sent to me says he is a man of about twenty-two or three, tall, rather slender, gray eyes, brown hair, clean shaven, good-looking, well educated, well appearing, likable sort of a chap. Haven't seen him, have you, Natachee?"

"I might run across him somewhere, some day," returned the Indian.

There was a sound in the adjoining room and the sheriff, who was sitting with his back toward the door, turned his head inquiringly.

Old Bob spoke quickly:

"What was he in for, Jim?"

And Thad asked in the same breath:

"A killin', was it?"

The officer gave his attention again to his hosts.

From where he sat the Indian, through the open kitchen door, saw Marta running toward the neighboring cabin.

The sheriff was answering the old prospectors:

"He was sent up for wrecking a big investment company in Los Angeles. You remember—the papers were full of the affair at the time."

Hugh Edwards did not know that his neighbors were entertaining visitors. He was at work in the creek bed when the sheriff arrived and when he went up to his cabin for his noontime lunch the Pardners and their guests were on the far side of the house, so that he could not see them. He had returned to his work and was energetically wielding his pick when he heard Marta's hurried step on the bank above. The girl came running and sliding down the steep path.

At sight of Marta's face, Edwards dropped his pick and ran to her.

"Marta dear, what is the matter? What has happened?"

In his alarm for her he forgot himself for the moment, and would have taken her in his arms, but her first hurried words brought him back with a shock.

"The sheriff—" she cried in a voice that trembled with fear and excitement.

Hugh Edwards stood as if stunned by a sudden blow, staring at her dully, unable to speak.

"Don't you understand?" she said sharply. "The sheriff is here—why don't you speak? Why don't you say something?" She caught him by the arm and shook him. "The sheriff is here, I tell you. He is looking for a man who escaped from prison."

Hugh Edwards drew a long shuddering breath and the girl saw him, in obedience to his first impulse, turn and start as if to run. Then, as suddenly he checked himself, and stood looking about in fearful indecision, not knowing which way to go. Another moment and he had regained control of himself.

Facing her with a steadiness which revealed the real strength of his character he said coolly:

"This is interesting, I'll admit, but don't you think perhaps you are a little overexcited?" he smiled reassuringly. "Suppose you tell me more."

Calmed by his strength the girl answered:

"Sheriff Burks and two of his men are searching for a convict who escaped from the Florence penitentiary two weeks ago. They stopped at our house to inquire if we had seen any strangers in the cañon recently, and we asked them to stay for dinner of course. Natachee happened in as he always does

when any one from outside comes to the cañon—and—and—while they were all eating and talking I slipped out the front door and ran over here to tell you."

Edwards laughed.

"A convict escaped from Florence two weeks ago. Well, he certainly is not in the Cañada del Oro or Natachee would know."

The girl looked at him pleadingly.

"I—I—am afraid Natachee does know." She shuddered. "He—it would be just like him to bring the sheriff and his men here. Please—please—won't you go? For my sake, won't you?"

At this Edwards looked at her searchingly.

"Go where?" he said at last. "What do you think the Indian knows? Why should I go anywhere?"

"You—you do not understand," the girl faltered. "You must hide somewhere, quick— Please, Hugh, they may come any minute."

Again Edwards looked about as if, while prompted to yield to her entreaty, he was still undecided as to the best course to pursue.

"But surely you know that I did not escape from Florence two weeks ago," he said slowly.

"I know—I know," she cried, "but there was another."

"Another?"

"Yes—a man who escaped from San Quentin six months ago. They followed him as far as Phœnix. He was coming this way. He was twenty-two or

twenty-three years old—tall—slender—gray eyes—brown hair—well educated— Oh, Hugh—Hugh—don't stand there looking at me like that! You must do something—you must go—quick—somewhere—anywhere where these men won't see you."

With a low cry of horror and despair the man leaped away, running like a startled deer up the creek. But before he had gone a hundred feet he stopped as suddenly as he had started and faced back toward the girl, holding out his arms in an unmistakable gesture of love and longing.

But Marta did not see. She had dropped to the ground, where she crouched with her face buried in her hands.

Still holding out his arms the man went slowly toward her. Then again he stopped, to stand for a moment irresolute, as one fighting with all the strength of his will against himself. And then once more he faced the other way, and stooping low, with head down, ran as if in fear for his life.

When Marta had recovered a little of her self-control she realized that she must not be seen near Edwards' cabin by the officers, who by this time must have finished their dinner. Hurriedly she stole away down the creek, thinking that if she was seen coming up the path that led from the Pardners' mine to the house no one would question as to where she had been.

When she had gained the top of the bank she saw

her fathers just outside the kitchen door deep in a heated argument. There was no one else in sight. Catching her breath sharply, the girl hurried on until she could gain an unobstructed view of the neighboring cabin. There was no one there. With a sob of relief she almost ran the remaining distance to the Pardners, who were by now watching her expectantly, as if wondering what she would do or say.

"Where are they? Have they gone?" she cried as she came up to them.

The two men looked at each other questioningly.

"Go ahead, you old fool, she's your gal, ain't she?" said Bob. "What's the use in your standin' there lookin' at me like that, I ain't done nothin'."

"Holy Cats!" ejaculated Thad. "Can't a man even look at you without you goin' mad? I ain't a-worryin' none about what you've done or about what anybody's done, if it comes to that. It's what you're likely to do that's got me layin' awake nights."

He turned to the girl and in a very different tone said:

"Sure they're gone. Jim figgered that if the man they wanted was in the Cañada del Oro, Natachee would a-seen him and so, as long as the Indian hadn't seen nobody strange in these parts, they've pulled out for the Tortollitas. Jim said to tell you good-by an' that they'd sure enjoyed your cookin'."

To the utter amazement of the two old prospectors their partnership girl burst into a joyous ringing laugh, and throwing her arms around each leathery wrinkled old neck in turn she kissed them and ran into the house.

Bob looked at Thad—Thad looked at Bob—together they looked toward the kitchen door through which their girl had disappeared.

"Holy Cats!" murmured Thad softly, as he rubbed his bald head. "Now what in seven states of blessedness do you make of that?"

"She must know," said Bob. "She must a-heard what Jim said—she ain't a plumb fool if she is your gal." He shook his head. "I give it up. Listen to that, will you?"

Marta, busy with her after-dinner kitchen work, was singing.

"One thing is certain sure," said Thad softly, "whatever trouble the boy may have got himself into, it's a dead immortal cinch that he ain't in no way different now from what he was before Jim Burks happened to eat dinner with us, an' that blamed Indian began askin' fool questions about what ain't none of his business."

"That's fair enough," returned Bob. "We didn't never take to Hugh for what some judge, that we never saw or heard tell of, said he was or wasn't. We threw in with him for what he is. An' if we're such a pair of boneheads as to be livin' with him like we have all this time without findin' out more about what he really is than any judge that ever

sat on a bench—well—we ought to be sentenced ourselves, that's what I'm sayin'."

Thad rubbed his bald head.

"At that," he said mournfully, "it wouldn't be the first time by several, that we'd ought to a-been sentenced, would it? If young Edwards was to go to pryin' into our records—huh—I'll bet he wouldn't feel proud of his neighbors no matter what he's done hisself."

Old Bob grinned cheerfully.

"You've said it, Pardner, by smoke!—if he was to know, the youngster would be hittin' it out of this Cañada del Oro so fast you wouldn't see Mount Lemmon for dust. Come to think of it, it's generally a healthy proposition not to know too much about your neighbors—the ones that you like, I mean. What is it the good book says: 'Where ignorance is bliss a man's a darned fool to poke around tryin' to find out things?' As for my gal, it's plain to be seen that she's plumb tickled at the way it's all turnin' out an'——"

"*Your* gal!" shrilled Thad. "Your gal!—there you go again. Holy Cats! Have you got to be allus tryin' to gouge me out of my rights? Can't you never give me a fair break?"

"Excuse me, Pardner, I forgot. As I was about to say, in my opinion you'd better let that gal of yourn work her own way out of this. It's easy to see that she's in too deep for us, an' considerin' everything—considerin' everything, I say—it might not turn out so bad after all."

To which Thad replied:

"However it looks an' however it turns out, my gal knows a heap more about it than us two old sand rats ever could. We're bankin' on the boy, an' we're trustin' the gal, an' we're mindin' our own business, you bet!"

To which Bob responded fervently:

"You bet!"

CHAPTER XVIII

AN INDIAN'S ADVICE

He felt that the Indian was playing some kind of a game—a game which the red man seemed rather to enjoy but which left the white man very much in the dark.

LESS than a mile up the cañon creek Hugh Edwards stopped. It was useless, he told himself, to go farther. He would wait there until night, when, under cover of the darkness, he could return to his cabin and secure food and the small store of gold he had accumulated. Seating himself on a rock in the shade of a sycamore, where he could watch and listen for any one attempting to follow his tracks, he gave himself up to troubled thoughts.

True, the sheriff had not come for him this time, but the officers might, while in the neighborhood, learn of his presence in the Cañon of Gold and return to investigate. Suppose, for instance, they should meet and talk with the Lizard. His supply of gold would not take him far, but he must go as far as he could; as for his dream and Marta—what a fool he had been to think that he could ever find gold enough to——

A hand touched his shoulder. With a cry he leaped to his feet, and like a wild animal caught in a trap whirled to fight.

Natachee made the peace sign. The Indian was smiling as he had smiled that night when Marta was in his cabin.

The white man's nerves were on edge. He glared at the Indian angrily.

"What do you mean sneaking up on a man like that?" he demanded. "You'll get yourself killed for that trick some day."

Natachee laughed, and there was a touch of scorn in his voice as he returned:

"Not by you, Hugh Edwards."

"And why not by me?" demanded the other, goaded by the Indian's tone and by the slight emphasis which the red man placed on his name.

"Because," said Natachee coolly, "you are not the killing kind, and because if you should, in a moment of wild madness, attempt such a thing, I—" he paused, then with an abrupt change in his tone and manner said: "I am sorry that I startled you. It was unpardonably rude, I'll admit, and you have every reason for being angry. I did not stop to think."

"It is nothing," returned Edwards. "I was a fool to fly up over such a thing. I—I'm a bit upset just now, that's all. Forget it."

He resumed his seat on the rock. The Indian seated himself on the ground near-by.

Edwards was thinking: Marta had said that Natachee had come to the house while the officers were there. How much of the sheriff's talk had the Indian heard? How much had he guessed? What was he doing here?

Almost as if to answer the white man's thoughts the Indian said casually:

"I happened in at the Pardners' place a while ago and found Sheriff Burks and two deputies there. I am going to Tucson to-morrow and dropped in to see if I could do any errand for them or for Miss Hillgrove. Then I called at your place to offer a like service but you were not at home. I happened to see you sitting on the rock here as I came up the cañon."

The Indian did not explain how, before the officers were out of sight, he had made his way with the noiseless speed of a fox to a point where from behind rocks and bushes he had witnessed the close of the interview between Marta and Edwards; and how, after the girl had returned to her home, he had trailed the white man. Neither did he explain that he had had no thought of going to Tucson when, from the mountain side, he saw Sheriff Burks and his men ride up to the Pardners' place.

"Thank you," said Edwards, "there is nothing you can do for me in Tucson."

Natachee waited several moments before he spoke again, and the uncomfortable thought flashed into Edwards' mind that the Indian seemed particularly pleased that he, the white man, had nothing to say. Edwards, in an agony of suspense, wondering, fearing, perplexed, baffled, dared not speak.

At last the Indian said softly:

"The sheriff and his men have gone away. They

are satisfied that the man they are looking for is not here. I assured them that there was no stranger in the Cañada del Oro."

"They are gone?" said Edwards doubtfully, as if he feared the Indian were playing him some cruel trick.

"For this time," Natachee said gravely.

"You—you—think they will come again?"

The Indian looked away and answered with odd deliberation:

"Who can say? There is always that possibility. Any day—any hour they may come. But if, in spite of what I told Sheriff Burks, the man wanted by him *is* in the Cañada del Oro, my advice to that man would be that he stay right where he is."

Hugh Edwards hesitated. He felt that the Indian was playing some kind of a game—a game which the red man seemed rather to enjoy but which left the white man very much in the dark.

"You don't think then that he—that the man could get away, out of this part of the country, I mean?" he said at last.

"The sheriff and his deputies will be watching every place but the Cañada del Oro," returned the Indian. "Because they are just now satisfied that their man is not here, this is the one safe place for him. And if they should by any chance return——"

"What," cried Edwards eagerly, "what if the officers *should* return?"

Still without looking at his companion Natachee answered:

"There are places in the Cañada del Oro where a man, if he knew these mountains as I know them, could hide from all the sheriffs in Arizona."

Haltingly, but with trembling eagerness, Hugh Edwards asked the inevitable question.

"And would you, Natachee, help such a man under such circumstances?"

"I might."

At this noncommittal answer Hugh Edwards moved uneasily.

"Do you know," he said at last, "I have fancied sometimes that you, being an Indian, hated all white people bitterly."

Natachee made no reply.

Edwards continued, as one feeling his way over dangerous ground:

"And yet you seem to enjoy the company of Saint Jimmy."

The Indian rose to his feet and stood looking down upon the white man and something in his face—a shadow of a cruel smile, a gleam of savage light in his dark eyes—something—made Edwards rise and draw back a step.

"I do enjoy the company of Doctor Burton," said the red man. "He is suffering. He is dying slowly. He is in torment. I am Natachee the Indian, why should I not enjoy the company of any white man who is like your Saint Jimmy or who can be made to suffer in any way?" For a moment he paused, then in a voice that made his words almost a command, he added: "I will return from Tucson in

three days. In the meantime if it should be necessary for you to go into the upper part of this cañon, find my hut if you can and make yourself at home. You will be very welcome. If you should not find my place—if you should get yourself lost, for instance, have no fear, I will find you. But if I were you I would not leave my cabin and my friends down yonder unless it were absolutely necessary."

Without waiting for a reply the Indian turned, and climbing the steep bank of the creek with amazing easy and quickness, disappeared.

Hugh Edwards went slowly back to his cabin.

Marta, who was watching, saw him coming and ran joyously to meet him.

CHAPTER XIX

ON EQUAL TERMS

She did not know what it was that had made the man she loved a fugitive from the law. She did not care. She was glad—glad because now her dream of happiness with him was possible.

AS Marta ran to meet him, Hugh Edwards could not but see that she was elated and happy. Not since that morning before the storm had she been in such a joyous mood. The depression, that since her meeting with the Lizard had been so marked, was gone. She was again her own frank, radiant self. But Edwards did not respond to the girl's happiness. When she would have spoken of the sheriff and the escaped convict he coldly prevented her. Concealing every hint of emotion under a mask of formal politeness, he repelled every advance and received her loving overtures of sympathy and loyal comradeship in silence.

In those months when his friendship for Marta had ripened into love it had not been easy for Hugh Edwards to deny himself the happiness which the girl in her love had so innocently offered. With all the strength of his will he had fought to do the thing that he knew to be right. A thousand times

he had told himself that to speak the words that would make her share the black shame of the fate that hung over him would be the part of a selfish coward. He must protect her from himself. When he had won gold enough to insure his freedom from the life of a convict, then he would tell her everything. With gold enough he could escape to a foreign land and Marta, when she knew his story, would go with him. But until he could assure himself that complete and final safety from the prison that threatened was within his reach, both for his own sake and for hers, he would not speak of his love.

And now suddenly the girl had learned a part of the truth. And it had only made her love for him more evident. At the same time the incident that had revealed to her his real purpose in coming to the Cañada del Oro had shown him that his fancied security in the Cañon of Gold was fancy indeed. Any day, any hour, any moment, the officers might come for him. The Lizard, the Indian, a chance unguarded word of the Pardners, any one of a hundred things might happen to put the men of the law upon his track. He must not—he must not—say the word that would bring upon the girl he loved the shame and misery that so surely awaited him if the sheriff should find him. More than ever now he was determined to save Marta from himself. But it was not easy. It had been hard before Marta knew what Sheriff Burks' visit had revealed to her —it was harder now. If only he could find the gold.

But nothing could dampen the girl's spirit. She was as sure of Hugh Edwards' love as if he had spoken. When she had believed that her own nameless and questionable birth was the reason for his refusal to declare his love, she had been miserable. But now that his own disgrace had been revealed she felt that the shame of her unknown parentage need be no longer a barrier between them. She did not know what it was that had made the man she loved a fugitive from the law. She did not care. She was glad—glad—because now her dream of happiness with him was possible. She saw now that the thing which had kept him from telling his love was not her lack of an honorable name but the dishonor of his own. He had been shielding her from himself. His silence had not been to save himself from the shame that she might bring to him, but rather to save her from the shame that was already his and which an avowal of his love would have led her to share.

And so she tried in every way to win through the guard he had set against her and to restore the dear comradeship which had been broken—first by the Lizard, and now through the visit of Sheriff Burks. With every wile of her womanhood—with every art of her sex—with all the frankness of her unspoiled nature—she offered herself. Secure in the confidence of his love, she tempted him to break the silence which he had with such fortitude imposed upon himself. And while her loving, generous heart was wrung with pity for his suffering, she gloried

in the strength that enabled him to endure against her, and rejoiced in the knowledge that his self-imposed torture was for love of her.

When she tried to make him talk to her of his past, he was silent. When she told him of her own history, he answered, bitterly, that she was fortunate in having no parents to disgrace, no name to dishonor. When she asserted her belief in him no matter what he was in the eyes of the law, he smiled grimly and remarked that, while he appreciated and was grateful for her confidence, her opinion could in no way alter the hard facts of the case. And every day, from the first light of the morning until it was so dark that he could no longer see, he toiled with desperate strength for the gold that would enable him to escape and, by insuring his freedom, make it possible for him to ask Marta to share his future.

He no longer saw the beauty and the grandeur of the mountains. The flowers no longer bloomed for him. He did not hear the birds that filled the Cañon of Gold with music. He did not now glory in the vigorous freshness of the morning. He no longer knew the peace of the restful nights. His every thought was of gold, gold, gold, because gold to him meant Marta. As so many men in the Cañon of Gold had whispered in the night, after a day of heavy fruitless toil: "To-morrow, perhaps," this man in the night whispered to himself: "To-morrow, perhaps."

Then came that night when Hugh Edwards was

startled out of his dream of the golden possibilities of to-morrow by a sound at his cabin door.

Springing to his feet he stood trembling with fear and dread—had the officers come?

Again came the sound of some one knocking lightly on the door.

With white lips he whispered to himself:

"It's only Thad or Bob or Marta, it's not late yet."

But he knew that it was late. He had seen the light in Marta's window go out two hours ago.

Again the knocking sounded.

In desperation he threw open the door.

It was Natachee.

CHAPTER XX

THE ONLY CHANCE

"The rabbit that is caught by the fox does not dictate to his captor."

SILENTLY the white man drew back.

The Indian stepped into the cabin and softly closed the door.

Edwards waited for his visitor to speak, while the red man gazed at him with a hint of that fleeting, shadowy smile of cruel pleasure and satisfaction.

"I returned from Tucson this afternoon," he said at last. "I came back to my place another way, over the mountains from the south. When the sun was gone I came down here to you."

Edwards did not know what to say. He realized that Natachee's visit, at that hour of the night, was more than a mere social call. He felt that for some reason he, the white man, had suddenly become of more than mere passing interest to the Indian. Recalling the Indian's manner at the time of their last meeting, he waited anxiously for what was to come. He managed to murmur a few commonplace words of welcome.

Natachee said gravely:

"I have something to tell you—something which I think will be of interest."

Edwards nervously offered a chair.

When they were seated, the Indian said:

"Perhaps I should tell you that I went to Tucson in your interest." He smiled as he added: "In your interest—and for *my* pleasure."

"I can't see how my interests have anything to do with your pleasure," returned the white man, stung by the touch of mockery in the Indian's tone.

"No? I suppose you can't. But you will understand presently," said the other, as if he enjoyed the situation and would prolong the pleasure it afforded him to witness the white man's uneasy fears.

"Suppose you explain yourself and be done with it," said Edwards shortly.

"You white men are all so impatient," murmured Natachee with taunting deliberation. "Really, you should learn a lesson of patience from the Indians. An Indian has need to be patient. He must wait and watch, long and untiringly, for his few opportunities, and then when his opportunity at last comes he must not fail through ill-advised haste to make the most of it. The white man squanders his pleasures as he squanders his wealth. With reckless, headlong, swinish eagerness to drink his fill at one gulp; he spills his cup of happiness before he has really tasted it. The Indian takes his pleasures with careful deliberation, as he compels his enemies to bear the pain of the torture, and so he enjoys in its fullness, to the last drop, whatever drink his gods are pleased to set before him."

"For God's sake say what you have come to say and be done with it!" cried Edwards.

The Indian laughed.

"Many a white man, in the old days, has begged an Indian to end it all quickly and have done with it. But," he added with triumphant insolence, "the rabbit that is caught by the fox does not dictate to his captor. I, Natachee the Indian, in my own way will tell you, Donald Payne, what I have come to say."

As the Indian spoke that name, the man, known as Hugh Edwards, sprang to his feet with a cry.

Natachee watched the effect of his words with cruel satisfaction.

When the Indian's victim had gained some control of his tortured nerves and had dropped weakly into his chair again, the red man said with savage irony:

"I regret, in a way, that Miss Hillgrove is not here to listen to my story."

The white man, with his head bowed in his hands, winced.

"It would add much to my pleasure if I could watch her enjoying it with you."

Hugh Edwards groaned as one in torment.

"But all that in good time," continued the Indian. "I must explain now how it came about that the rabbit, Donald Payne, is under the paw of the Indian fox.

"When Sheriff Burks described the criminal who escaped from the California penitentiary I saw a possible opportunity that promised me, Natachee,

no little pleasure and satisfaction—an opportunity for which I have been waiting. Miss Hillgrove's agitation, her going to you, and your own action, confirmed my opinion as to where the convict who had so far escaped the officers was to be found. But I realized that it might be well to learn more. Thinking it unwise to appear too interested before the sheriff, I went to Tucson—first making sure that you would be here when I returned. In the white man's city, clothed properly in the white man's costume, with careful white man's manners, I was permitted to search the files of the white man's newspapers, and, thanks to my white education, to read the shameful account of this escaped convict's crime.

"I learned how Donald Payne, a promising young business man and a graduate of the California University, had held an important position of trust in a certain investment company. This company had been specifically planned and organized to attract the savings of small investors. Its appeal was to the better class of workmen, who out of their meager earnings were ambitious to put by something for the better education of their children—widows, with a little life insurance money upon the income of which they must exist—school-teachers, who must save against that dread day when they could no longer work—stenographers, clerks, and that class of poor whose education and tastes were above their earnings, and in whose hearts hope was kept alive by the promise of safe and honest returns from

their hard-saved pennies. Every dollar in that institution of trust represented honest human effort and worthy ambition and heroic self-sacrifice.

"Oh, it was a white man's enterprise, born of a white man's devilish cunning, and carried out with a white man's remorseless cruelty to its damnable end. When the people's confidence had been won, and they had been persuaded to place enough of their savings in the hands of these spoilers to make it worth while, the company failed. The investors lost everything. The promoters—the principals of the company—gained everything. But Donald Payne, the brilliant young financial genius whose manipulation brought about the wreck, went to San Quentin prison.

"He had served eighteen months of his sentence when he escaped. His mother, a widow, broken-hearted over the shame and dishonor, scorned and ostracized by her neighbors and friends, humiliated by the cruel publicity, died in less than a month after her son was pronounced guilty. Donald Payne is without doubt the most hated, the most despised name in this decade."

The man who, during the Indian's deliberate recital, had sat cowering in his chair, raised his haggard face. His eyes were dull with anguish, his lips were drawn and white; but in spite of his ghastly appearance there was a strange air of dignity in his manner as he said hoarsely:

"And is that all you know?"

The Indian waited a little as if to give the greatest possible significance to his answer, then:

"No, not quite all. I know that this escaped convict, Donald Payne, has learned to love a woman. And I know that this woman loves this man, who is hiding from the officers who would send him back to prison."

"Yes," said the white man, hoarsely, "that is true. If it is any satisfaction to you, I confess my love for Marta Hillgrove. I have every reason to believe in her love for me, and—I—dare not—for her sake—tell her of my love."

He rose to his feet and stood before the Indian with a dignity and strength that won a gleam of admiration from the dark eyes of his tormentor, and in a voice ringing with passionate earnestness cried:

"But, listen, you damned red savage. You do not yet know all the truth. Donald Payne was never guilty of the crime for which he was sentenced. I was an innocent tool in the hands of the real criminal. It was a part of his plan from the first that some one should be offered, a sacrifice, to satisfy the public. He schemed far ahead to prove some one guilty and thus secure himself. I was chosen for that end. I was promoted to a position of trust with my sacrifice in view. It was all planned, arranged, and carried out. The man who robbed the people and for whose crime I was sent to prison is to-day living in Los Angeles in safety and luxury with the wealth he acquired through the company which he promoted and wrecked.

"The people who hate me, because they believe me guilty, do not know. The papers that branded me with shame and heralded my disgrace to every corner of the world do not know. The jury that convicted me did not know. The judge did not know. My mother did not know. The penitentiary does not know. The officers who would drag me back to it all do not know. *But I know—I know—I know!*"

He stood madly, superbly defiant, uplifted for the moment by the strength of his own asserted innocence. Then suddenly, as a beef animal falls under the blow of the butcher's killing maul, he dropped into his chair, where he writhed in an agony greater than any physical suffering could have wrought.

The deep voice of the watching Indian broke the silence.

"Good! It is even better than I could have believed. In my wildest dreams I never hoped to see a white man suffer such unmerited torture. In time, perhaps, you will even come to a degree of sympathy for an Indian, and to understand, a little, his feeling toward the white race."

When Hugh Edwards was able to speak again he said with dreary hopelessness:

"They will come for me in the morning, I suppose?"

"They? Who?"

"The officers—have you not told them?"

Natachee laughed.

"I tell the officers what I know about you?

I give you up for them to take you back to the penitentiary? No—no—you do not seem to have grasped the purpose of my efforts in your behalf. I shall keep you for myself. I have too much pleasure in you to permit any one to take you away from me. You shall go with me, and together we, the two outcasts, we who are outcasts because of nothing that we have done, but only because some one wished by our misfortune and suffering to gain riches, we shall enjoy life together as we can."

The note of exaltation that was in his voice, or some hint of a sinister purpose in his manner, aroused the white man.

"You mean that you are going to help me to escape?"

"From your white man's laws, yes. From me, no—not yet—not until I am through with you."

"Explain yourself," demanded the other. "What is it that you propose? I don't understand."

"It is this," returned the Indian. "You cannot stay here because any day—to-morrow even—the sheriff may come for you. You cannot go from this Cañon of Gold because you would surely be caught, unless you could leave this country, and that you cannot do because you have no money. You shall come with me. With me you will be safe from the law. No one will know where you are. No one shall ever find you. I, Natachee, know these mountains as no white man can ever know them. I will hide you."

There was something in the Indian's face that made Hugh Edwards gaze at him in wondering silence.

The Indian continued:

"I will show you where you can dig more gold than ever you would find here. Who knows, perhaps you may even find the Mine with the Iron Door. With gold enough you could make your way to safety. You could even take the woman you love with you. And so you shall work and dream and dream—and I, Natachee—I will help you to dream. If your dream never comes true, if your labor is all in vain, if you never find the Mine with the Iron Door, or if, while you are toiling for the gold you need, the woman you love should become the wife of your friend Saint Jimmy, why, that will not be my fault. I will help you to dream. It will be for you to find the gold that will make your dream come true—*if you can.*"

The Indian spoke those last three words with fiendish deliberation and sinister meaning that was unmistakable.

Hugh Edwards understood.

"You are a devil."

"No, I am Natachee the Indian—you are a white man."

"You would save me from prison so that you might feast your damned revengeful spirit on my suffering."

"It is a help for you to understand exactly my purpose," returned the Indian.

"What if I refused to go with you?"

"You will not refuse."

"Why?"

"If you go with me you take your only possible chance for the future. You might, you know, find the gold. If you do not go, I shall send you back to prison."

"I will go."

"Good, but—you must understand. You will leave here with me to-night. There will be no message—no hint to tell any one why you have gone, or where, or that you will ever come again. As long as you are with me you will be as one dead to all who have ever known you."

"But Marta—Miss Hillgrove—" cried the other.

Drawing himself up with the air of a conqueror, the Indian answered coldly:

"I, Natachee, have spoken."

When morning came, Marta saw no smoke rising from the chimney of Hugh Edwards' cabin. At first she told herself, with a laugh, that Hugh was sleeping later than usual, and went happily about her own early morning work. But as the hours passed and there was no sign of life about the neighboring cabin, she became uneasy. By the time breakfast was over and the Pardners had gone to their work, the girl was fully convinced that all was not right and went to investigate.

Knocking at the cabin door, she called:

"Hugh— Oh, Hugh!"

There was no answer.

She went hurriedly to the top of the bank above the place where he worked.

He was not there.

Running back to the cabin she knocked again.

"Hugh— Oh, Hugh! What is the matter?"

There was no sound.

Pushing open the door she stood on the threshold. The room was empty.

The truth forced itself upon the girl with overwhelming weight. Hugh Edwards was gone. He had not merely left his cabin for an hour or a day. He had not stepped out somewhere to return again presently. He was *gone*. Sometime during the night he had packed his things and had disappeared with no parting word—no good-by—no promise—leaving no message. He had vanished.

The girl was stunned. She argued with herself dully that she must be mistaken—that it could not be so. Hugh, her Hugh, would never do such a cruel, cruel thing.

From the open doorway she looked out at the familiar scene, at the cañon walls, the mountain ridges and peaks, her home—nothing was changed. She turned again to the empty, silent room. Hugh was gone.

But there must be something—some word to tell her—to explain.

Carefully, with slow, leaden movements, she searched every corner of the bare room. She looked in the cupboard, under the bunk, in every crevice

of the walls. She even searched with a stick among the dead ashes in the fireplace. There was nothing.

She did not cry out. The hurt was too deep. She sat on the threshold of the empty cabin and tried to make it all seem real.

It was two hours later when Saint Jimmy found her sitting there.

CHAPTER XXI

THE WAY OF A RED MAN

"The dark clouds of the white man's lust for gold have hidden all the stars in the red man's sky."

THE weeks of the "Little Spring" passed. The blossoms vanished from mountain and foothill and mesa and desert. The air grew crisp with the tang of frost. On the higher elevations the cold winds moaned through the junipers and cedars—wailed among the peaks and shrieked about the cliffs and crags. Again on Mount Lemmon the snow gleamed, white and cold, among the somber pines.

In the wild remote region of the upper Cañada del Oro the man, known to his friends in the Cañon of Gold as Hugh Edwards, lived with his captor, Natachee the Indian.

The white man was not a prisoner of force—rather was he a captive of circumstance. But captive and prisoner he was, none the less. He was held by the red man's threat to reveal his real name and identity as the convict who had escaped from San Quentin, together with that hope so cunningly offered by the Indian—the hope of finding the gold that would bring him freedom and the woman he loved.

Every day the white man toiled with pick and shovel in a hidden gulch where the Indian had shown to him a little gold in the sand and gravel. Every night before the fire in the Indian's hut he brooded over his memories, dreamed dreams of freedom and love, or sat despondent with the meager returns of his day's labor. And always the Indian held out to him the possibilities of to-morrow. To-morrow he might, at one stroke of his pick, open a golden vein of such magnitude that the realization of all his dreams would be assured — to-morrow — to-morrow.

His small hoard of gold increased so slowly that, unless he should strike a rich pocket, it would be years before he could accumulate enough to win his freedom and his happiness. But gold was his only hope. And every day he found enough to justify the belief that all he needed was near to his hand if only he could find it. He was held by that chain of to-morrows.

In the meantime, what of Marta? Would her love endure? With no explanation of his sudden disappearance—with no word of love from him—no promise of his return—no message to bid her hope —would she wait for him? Was her faith in him strong enough to stand under such a cruel test?

Many times during the first weeks of his strange captivity he begged the Indian for permission to send some word to the woman he loved. But the red man invariably answered, "No," with the cold warning that if he made any attempt to communicate

with any one he should be returned to prison. When the white man realized that his importunities only served to give the Indian a cruel pleasure, he ceased to plead.

Then one evening just at dusk the red man said:

"Come, my friend, this will not do at all. You are not nearly so entertaining as you were. You need inspiration—come with me."

He led the way to a point on the mountain ridge not far above the hut. The colors of the sunset were still bright in the western sky and behind them the higher peaks and crags were glowing in the light, but far below in the Cañon of Gold and over the desert beyond, the deepening dusk lay like a shadowy sea.

"Look!" said the Indian, pointing into the gloomy depths. "Do you see it—down there directly under that lone bright star? Almost as if it were a reflection of the star, only not so cold?"

"Do you mean that light?"

"Yes, you have good eyes for a white man," answered the Indian. "I am glad. I feared you might not be able to see it."

He paused and the other, watching the tiny red point in the darkness so far below, waited.

"That light is in the home of your friends, the Pardners and their daughter."

The Indian's victim muttered an exclamation.

"In fact," continued Natachee slowly as if to make every word effective, "it shines through the window of Miss Hillgrove's room."

The white man stood with his eyes fixed on that distant light, as one under a spell, then suddenly he whirled about, cursing his tormentor for bringing him there.

The Indian smiled, as in the old days one of his savage ancestors might have smiled in triumph, at a cry of pain successfully wrung from a victim of the torture. Then he said with stern but melancholy dignity:

"I, Natachee, often come here to sit on this spot from which one may look so far over the homeland of my Indian fathers. But for Natachee there is no light in the window of love. Where you, a white man, see the light, the red man sees only darkness. For Natachee the Indian there is no soft fire of a woman's love and home and happy children. Where the fires of the Indian's home life and love once burned, there are now only cold ashes and blackened embers. I shall often see you up here watching your star that is so near. But for me, Natachee, there is no star. The dark clouds of the white man's lust for gold have hidden all the stars in the red man's sky."

In spite of his own suffering, Hugh Edwards was moved to pity.

On another occasion the Indian told his victim of Marta's visit to his hut that night of the storm. He called attention to the fact that the very chair in which Hugh was sitting was the chair in which she had sat before the fire. The couch upon which Hugh slept was the couch upon which she had slept. Hugh's place at the table had been her place.

Invariably, when he saw that the white man was nearing the limit of his endurance, the Indian would hold before him the promise of the future—the love and happiness that would be his when he should find the gold—the gold that he would perhaps strike—to-morrow.

At times the Indian would be gone for two or three days. Always he left with no word or hint that he was going. The white man would awaken in the morning to find himself alone in the hut, or perhaps the Indian would disappear at a moment when Hugh's back was turned, or again Edwards, upon returning from his work in the evening, would find that Natachee had left the place sometime during his absence. Invariably, when the red man reappeared, he came in the same unexpected and unannounced manner. The white man never knew when to look for him, nor where. Often the captive would look up from his work to find the Indian only a few feet away, watching him.

At times, when Natachee returned from an absence of a day or more, he would tell his victim of Marta—how he had seen and talked with her—how she looked—what she was doing—painting such true and vivid pictures of the girl that the captive's heart would ache with longing. Then the Indian, watching with devilish cunning the effect of his words, would assure his victim that the girl loved him but that she believed he had left her because he did not care for her, and that the grief of her disappointment and loneliness was seriously affecting her health.

"What a pity," the Indian would say mockingly, "that you cannot find the gold!" And then he would picture the happiness that would come to this man and woman—how they would go together to a place of peace and security—how, in the fullness of their love and in the joys of their companionship, the pain and suffering would all be forgotten. "If," he always added, "you could only find the gold."

Again the red man, with fiendish skill, would tell how he had seen Saint Jimmy and Marta together. He would talk of Saint Jimmy's love for her—of his tender devotion and care, and of the girl's affection for her teacher. He would relate how they spent hours together—how, in her grief, Marta had sought the comforting companionship of her gentle friend.

"I fear," Natachee would say, "that if you do not find the gold soon it will be too late. What a tragedy it would be for you, for Doctor Burton, and for the girl, if, when you are able to go to her, you should find her the wife of your friend. But to-morrow, perhaps, you will find the gold."

Every evening at sunset, when he thought that the Indian was away somewhere in the mountains, Hugh Edwards would climb to that place on the ridge from which he could see that tiny point of red light so far below in the dark depth of the Cañon of Gold. And not infrequently, when the light had at last gone out, he would return to the hut to learn that the red man had been watching him.

When, under the torment of the Indian's cruel art,

the victim would rebel, Natachee talked of the prison—of the future of shame and horror that awaited the returned convict if he should again fall into the clutches of the law. Reminded thus that his only chance was in finding gold the man would return to his labor with exhausting energy.

And Hugh Edwards, with his lack of experience in such things, never once dreamed that all the gold he dug in that hidden gulch was put there by the crafty Indian. Night after night when the white man was sleeping, Natachee stole from the hut to the place where his victim toiled, and there "salted" the sand and gravel with a small quantity of the precious metal.

In her home in the Cañon of Gold, Marta waited, as so many women have waited while their men toiled for the yellow treasure that meant happiness. She could not understand. But neither could she doubt Hugh Edwards' love. She only knew that some day he would come again. With Saint Jimmy and Mother Burton to help her, she would be patient.

More than ever, in those days of her waiting, the Pardner's girl depended for strength and courage and guidance upon her two friends in the little white house on the mountain side. More than ever, they were dear to her.

The Pardners too had faith that their neighbor would return.

"An' when he comes," said old Bob, "you can bet your pile he's comin' with bells on. We don't know what it is that has took him away so sudden-

like, but whatever it is, it ain't nothin' that we'll be ashamed of when we know."

And Thad, with characteristic fervor, added:

"Well, Holy Cats, there ain't no law, leastwise in this here Cañada del Oro, that says a man has got to advertise every time he makes a move. You're tootin'—the boy'll come back, an' he'll come with head up an' steppin' high—that's what I'm meanin'."

It was on one of these occasions, when the Indian was taunting his victim with the assurance that more gold than he needed was within his reach if only he knew where to look, that the white man turned on his tormentor with a contemptuous laugh.

"Do you think that I am fool enough to believe that you actually know of any such rich deposit near here?"

The words seemed to have a marked effect upon the Indian. Hugh saw, with a thrill of satisfaction and not a little wonder, that he had by chance broken through the red man's armor of stoical composure.

Natachee threw up his head and held himself stiffly erect with the pride of a savage conqueror, while his eyes were gleaming with intense mental excitement, and his voice rang with challenging force, as he said:

"You think that I, Natachee, am lying when I say that I know where there is gold beyond even a white man's dream of wealth?"

"I know you are lying," returned Hugh coldly.

"Your talk of great wealth so near when I am finding so little is pure fiction. Because you know that I would almost give my soul to find a reasonably rich pocket, even, you have invented the story of this marvelously rich deposit, to torture me. If I believed it were true, I might, under the circumstances, feel worked up over it, but as it is you may as well save your breath. You are not worrying me in the least."

"Good!" said Natachee, "the night is very dark. If the white man is not a coward he will come with me."

"Go with you?" exclaimed the other. "Where?"

"You shall never know *where*," replied the Indian. "But you shall see that I, Natachee, do not lie."

From a peg in the wall he took a short rope and from the cupboard drawer a cloth and two candles. One of the candles he offered to Hugh with an insolent smile.

"If you are not afraid of the ghosts that, in the night and the darkness, haunt the Cañon of Gold."

The amazed white man, snatching the candle, motioned impatiently for the Indian to proceed.

CHAPTER XXII

THE LOST MINE

"The hope that brought the first white man to the Cañada del Oro is your only hope. You shall labor—you shall find your gold—if you can."

FROM the door of the hut the Indian led the way into the darkness.

There was no friendly moon. The sky was overcast with lowering clouds that shut out the light of the stars. From the thick blackness of the cañon far below, the sullen murmur of the creek came up like the growl of angry voices from the depth of some black pit. The mountains seemed to breathe like gigantic monsters in a weird, dream world. The very air was heavy with the mystery of the night.

They had not gone a hundred yards before the white man lost all sense of direction. As they made their way down the steep side of the mountain he could scarcely distinguish the form of the Indian who was within reach of his hand.

Presently Natachee stopped, and, lighting the candle he carried, said:

"See, there is your pick and shovel. Are you satisfied that this is the place where you work?"

"Certainly, I can see that," returned the other wonderingly.

"Good!" returned the Indian. "Now we will go only a little way from this place."

He extinguished the candlelight, and the inky darkness enveloped them like a blanket.

"But," he added, "I must first make sure of your never again going as we shall go. I will blindfold you and you will follow me by holding fast to this rope. Are you willing?"

There was a taunting sneer in his tone that would have goaded the white man into any reckless adventure.

"As you like," he said shortly.

When the cloth was bound securely about Hugh's eyes, the Indian caught him by the arms and whirled him about until he was completely bewildered. Then he felt one end of the rope thrust into his hand.

"Come," said the Indian, and gave a slight pull on the rope.

It was impossible for the white man to form any idea as to their course. At times they climbed upward, then again they descended as rapidly. At other times they made their way along some steep slope. Now and then the Indian bade him go on hands and knees, or warned him to move with care and to hold fast to the shrubs and bushes. At last Hugh Edwards knew that they were entering a cavern by an opening barely large enough for them to crawl through. He could not even guess the dimensions of this underground chamber, but he imagined that it was a passage or tunnel, for as they went on he touched a wall on his right and the Indian cautioned him to keep his head down.

For some distance they walked in this fashion, then Natachee stopped, and the white man heard him strike a match. A moment later his blindfold was removed.

"Your candle," said Natachee sharply, and lighted it from the one he himself held.

The white man gazed curiously about him.

"Look!" cried the Indian. "Look and say if I, Natachee, lied when I told you of the gold that is so near the place where you work—if only you knew where to find it."

Natachee the Indian had not lied. Thousands upon thousands of dollars in golden value lay within the circle of the candlelight.

Hugh Edwards stood amazed. He could not know the full extent of the vein, but a fortune of staggering proportions was within sight. The farther end of the chamber was an irregular mass of rocks and earth that had quite evidently fallen and slid from above; but the remaining walls and ceiling were as obviously cut by human hands.

The white man looked at his companion inquiringly.

"An old mine?"

The Indian, with an air of triumph, answered:

"The Mine with the Iron Door."

As one half dreaming feels for something real and tangible, Hugh Edwards said hesitatingly:

"But why, knowing this, have you not made use of it—why do you leave such wealth buried here?"

"You forget that I am an Indian," the red man answered. "If I, Natachee, were to tell the secret of the Mine with the Iron Door, would the white men permit me to retain this treasure or to use it for my people? When has your race ever permitted an Indian to have anything that a white man wanted for himself? Suppose it were possible for me to take this treasure without revealing the secret of the mine—of what use would its gold be to me? Could I, an Indian, use such wealth without bringing upon myself and my people, envy, hatred and persecution from those who say that this is a white man's country?

"And suppose I could use this gold? What would an Indian do with gold? The things that the white man buys with gold mean nothing to an Indian. We do not want the white man's things. We do not want your factories and railroads and ships and banks and churches. We do not want your music, your art, your libraries and schools. An Indian does not want any of the things that this yellow stuff means to the white man.

"Could I, with this gold, restore to my people the homeland of their fathers? Could I destroy your cities, your government, your laws and all the institutions of your civilization that you have built up in this, the land that you have taken by force and treachery from my people? Could I, Natachee, with this gold bring back the forests you have cut down, the streams you have dried up or poisoned, the lands you have made desolate? Could I bring

back the antelope, the deer and all the life that the white man has destroyed?"

Stooping, he caught up a piece of the quartz that was heavy with the gold it carried. Holding it in the light of the candle, he said:

"Before the white man came, this, to the Indians, was only a pretty stone, of no more value than any other bright-colored pebble. If the red man used it at all it was as an ornament of trivial significance —of no real worth. But to the white man, this is everything. It is honor and renown—it is achievement and success—it is the beginning and the end of life—it is sacrifice and hardship—it is luxury and want—it is bloody war with its murdered millions—it is government—it is law—it is religion—it is love. And it was this—this bit of worthless yellow dirt—that brought the first white man to the Indians. For gold, the white adventurers braved the dangers of an unknown ocean and forced their way into an unknown land. For gold, they have robbed and killed the people whose homeland they invaded, until to-day we are as dead grass and withered leaves in the pathway of the fire of the white man's greed. We are as a handful of desert dust in the whirlwind of your civilization."

He threw the piece of quartz aside with a gesture of loathing, and stood for a moment with his head lowered in sorrow.

And once again Hugh Edwards, in spite of the cruel torture to which the Indian had subjected him, felt a thrill of pity for his tormentor.

But before the white man could find words to express his emotions, Natachee suddenly lifted his head, and with the cruel light of savage exultation blazing in his eyes, went a step toward his startled companion.

"Do you understand now why I have brought you here? Do you understand my purpose in permitting you to see, with your own eyes, the gold of the Mine with the Iron Door?

"Your only hope of freedom, from the hell to which you have been condemned through a white man's trickery and by your white man's laws, is in gold. Only through the possession of gold can you hope to win the woman you love and who loves you.

"You say you would give your soul for the gold which means so much to you. Good! I believe you. I am glad. Here is the gold—look at it—handle it—dream of all that it would bring you. Here is freedom from your hell—here is love—here is happiness—here is the woman you love. It is all here, within reach of your hand, and you shall never touch one grain of it. If you had a hundred souls to offer in exchange, you should not touch one grain of it. Because you are a white man, and because I am an Indian.

"I, Natachee, have spoken."

The meaning of the Indian's words burned in the white man's brain. Slowly he looked about that treasure chamber as if summing up in his mind all that it might mean to him. His nerves and muscles were tense with agony. Beads of sweat glistened on

his forehead. His face was twisted in a grimace of pain. And in the agony of his torture a dreadful purpose came.

The watching Indian saw, and his sinewy hand loosed the knife in his belt, as his deep voice broke the silence of the old mine.

"No, you will not try that. You are unarmed. I would kill you before you could strike a blow. There is no hope for you there. Your one chance is to dig for the gold you need. You might strike it rich, you know. Who can say—to-morrow—another stroke of your pick. The hope that brought the first white man to the Cañada del Oro is your only hope. As so many of your race have labored in the Cañon of Gold you shall labor—you shall find your gold—if you can."

The white man bowed his head.

Natachee went to him with the cloth to bind his eyes.

Quietly Hugh Edwards submitted to the bandage. The Indian extinguished the light of the candle and thrust the end of the rope into his victim's unresisting hand.

"The white man is wise to take the one chance that is his," said the Indian. "Come. To-morrow, perhaps, you will find gold."

Through the remaining weeks of the winter Hugh Edwards toiled with all his strength for the grains of yellow metal that the Indian secretly permitted him to find. Day and night the knowledge of the Mine with the Iron Door tortured him. Many times he

was tempted to abandon all hope, and, by surrendering himself to the officers of the law, escape at least the torment of his strange situation. But always he was held by the one chance—to-morrow he might find the gold that meant freedom and Marta and love.

And at last, one day in spring, when the mountain slopes again were bright with blossoms—when the gold of the buckbean shone in the glades, and whispering bells were nodding in the shadows of the cañon walls—when the glory of the ocotillo, the flaming sword, was on the foothills, and "our Lord's candles" again lit the mesas with their torches of white, Hugh Edwards looked up from his work in the gulch to see a stranger.

CHAPTER XXIII

SONORA JACK

"But here is the amazing thing—Sonora Jack knows more about these two old prospectors and their partnership daughter than even you know."

WHEN he saw that he was discovered, the man who was watching Hugh Edwards came leisurely forward. At the same instant Hugh thought that he glimpsed another figure farther away on the mountain side.

The stranger explained his presence in the neighborhood by saying that he was hunting and had wandered farther from his camp than he had intended. For nearly an hour he and Edwards visited in the manner of men who meet by chance in the lonely open places. Then with a careless *adios* he went on his way down the cañon.

When Hugh, at the close of his day's work, went up to the cabin, Natachee was not at home. But when the white man had finished his supper the Indian appeared, coming in his usual silent, unexpected way. As he set about preparing his own supper, Natachee said:

"You had visitors to-day."

Hugh was too accustomed to the red man's uncanny way of knowing things to be in the least surprised at his companion's remark.

He answered indifferently:

"I had a visitor."

"There were two in the neighborhood," returned Natachee. "I saw their tracks just before dark."

Hugh told how only one man had talked with him but that he thought he had caught a glimpse of another.

"That was the Lizard," said Natachee. "I would know his tracks anywhere. I have seen them often. His right foot turns in in a peculiar way and his boot heels are always worn on the inside."

Hugh Edwards caught his breath.

"Do you think they were——"

"After you?" Natachee finished for him. "I can't say yet. It might be. What was the man who talked with you like?"

Hugh described the stranger.

"Medium height, rather heavy, black hair, eyes very dark, a Mexican, or at least part Mexican, I would say."

"Did he ask many questions about you?"

"No more than any one would naturally ask."

"Did he show any curiosity about me?"

"No, you were not mentioned. He said he was hunting but he seemed to be rather interested, too, in prospecting and mining, and asked a lot of questions about the country up here as if he had a general idea of the lay of the land but was not exactly sure."

Natachee said no more until he had finished his supper. Then, going to a corner of the cabin at the

head of his bed, he pulled up a loose board in the floor, and from the hiding place took a revolver with its holster and belt of cartridges.

Offering the weapon to the astounded white man, he said with a meaning smile:

"I brought this for you from Tucson last fall. But, considering everything, I thought that it might be just as well for you not to have it unless some occasion should arise. I am going to leave you for a little while. Until I return you must keep this gun within reach of your hand every minute—day and night."

Hugh took the weapon awkwardly.

"Do you know how to use it?" asked Natachee sharply.

The other laughed.

"Oh, yes. I know how, but I couldn't hit a flock of barns."

"You must carry it just the same," returned the Indian. "But don't do any practicing. Keep your eyes open for any one who may be prowling around and don't let them see you if you can avoid it. This stranger may be a hunter or a prospector—he may be an officer—he may be something else. I shall know before I see you again."

Taking his bow and quiver of arrows, the Indian went out into the night.

For two days and nights Hugh Edwards was alone. Then Natachee returned.

When the Indian had eaten, with the appetite of a

man who has been long hours without food, he said:

"The man who talked with you is called Sonora Jack. He is a half-breed Mexican; his real name is John Richards.

"For several years this Sonora Jack, with a band of Mexicans and white outlaws, operated in this section of the Southwest. They rustled cattle, robbed trains, looted banks and stores, and held up everybody they chanced to run across. With their headquarters somewhere south of the line, it was not so easy for the United States authorities to capture them, but after a particularly cold-blooded murder of a poor old couple who were traveling by wagon through the country, the officers and the people were so aroused that Sonora Jack, with a large reward on his head, moved on to other less dangerous hunting grounds. It is generally believed that he went south somewhere in Mexico."

"But are you sure that it was this same Sonora Jack that called on me?"

The Indian smiled.

"As sure as I am that you are Donald Payne."

Hugh Edwards flushed as he returned coldly:

"Please don't forget that Donald Payne is dead."

"That depends," retorted Natachee dryly.

The white man did not overlook the Indian's meaning. For a time he did not speak, then he asked:

"But what has brought this outlaw here to the Cañada del Oro?"

Natachee's face was grave as he answered:

"The Mine with the Iron Door."

Hugh Edwards uttered an exclamation.

"You mean that he has come to look for the lost mine?"

For several minutes the Indian did not reply, but sat as if lost in thought, then he said, as one reaching a grave decision:

"Listen—I will tell you exactly what I have learned. It is of very great importance to us both.

"This Sonora Jack, with a Mexican who I am quite sure is a member of his old band, first appeared in the Cañada del Oro several days ago. They came in by the Oracle trail and called on Doctor Burton and his mother, telling them that they were prospectors. I have talked to the Burtons and they do not dream of the real characters or mission of the two strangers who camped at Juniper Spring.

"Apparently Sonora Jack and his companion met the Lizard, for they moved down the cañon and are now living with the Lizard and his people. The Lizard seems to be helping them with his supposed knowledge of the country. Sonora Jack has a map, crudely drawn, and evidently very old. Under the drawing in one corner is written:

"'La mina con la puerta de fierro en la Cañada del Oro'—The mine with the door of iron in the Cañon of the Gold."

Again Hugh Edwards uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"But how in the world do you know all this?" he demanded.

The Indian explained.

"In the Lizard's house the table is close under one of the windows. While Sonora Jack and his Mexican and the Lizard were looking at the map and trying to determine the exact location of a certain gulch that was many years ago filled by a landslide, I also looked."

"But those dogs," cried the white man, "they were ready to eat me one night when I happened to call there."

"You are not an Indian," Natachee returned calmly. "Bows and arrows make no sound. The Lizard will be short of dogs until he has an opportunity to steal some new curs."

"Fine!" said Hugh.

Natachee continued:

"I not only saw their map, but, as it happens, there is a little place under the sill of that particular window where the adobe wall has crumbled away from the wood, and so I could hear what was said as clearly as if I had been sitting at the table with them.

"The Lizard told them all about the Indian who is commonly supposed to know the secret of the lost mine. Some of the things he said I rather think you would agree with. He also told them a good deal about you. He knows you only by the name of Hugh Edwards, but I must say that some of the things he reported were not what you might call complimentary."

"I imagine not," returned Hugh.

Again Natachee, for some time, seemed to be weighing some matter of greater moment than the things he had related; while the white man, seeing the Indian so absorbed in his own thoughts, waited in silence.

"There was something else that Sonora Jack and his companion talked about," said Natachee, at last, "something that I cannot understand."

Then looking straight into the white man's eyes he asked slowly:

"Will you tell me all that you know about Miss Hillgrove and her two fathers?"

Hugh Edwards drew back and his face darkened. The Indian saw the effect of his words and raised his hand to check the white man's angry reply.

"I understand your thought," he said calmly. "But I assure you I am not amusing myself at your expense. It is for your interest as well as for mine that I ask."

Believing that the Indian was speaking sincerely, even though for some reason of his own, and prompted by his alarm at this mention of Marta, Hugh asked:

"Am I to understand that Miss Hillgrove was discussed by this outlaw and his companions?"

"Yes," said Natachee. "The Lizard told Sonora Jack all that he knew and perhaps more. I am asking you so that we may know how much of the Lizard's story is true."

In a few words Hugh related how the Pardners

had found Marta when the girl was little more than a baby.

When he had finished the Indian said:

"I knew the story in a general way and the Lizard told it substantially as you have. But here is the amazing thing—Sonora Jack knows more about these two old prospectors and their partnership daughter than even you know."

Hugh Edwards was speechless with astonishment.

The Indian continued:

"When the Lizard first mentioned Miss Hillgrove's name, it was in connection with you, and Sonora Jack only laughed and made a coarse jest. But when the Lizard went on to tell of her relationship to Bob and Thad, the outlaw was so excited that he almost shouted. He asked question after question—her age—how long she and the Pardners had been in the Cañada del Oro—where they came from—everything—and as the Lizard answered, the outlaw would translate to his Mexican companion, who was as excited as Sonora Jack himself. And when the Lizard had told him all he could, the two talked together in Mexican a long time. I cannot repeat all that was said but Sonora Jack cried many times: 'It is the same girl, Jose, the very same—Jesu Cristo! what luck—what marvelous luck!'

"One thing is certain—this outlaw in some way expects to make a fortune through the old Pardners and their girl. I do not know how. But Sonora Jack said to the Mexican that whether they found

the lost mine or not, their coming to the Cañada del Oro was certain now to make them both rich."

"Is it possible," asked Hugh, "that Thad and Bob were one time in any way mixed up with this Sonora Jack?"

"I thought of that," returned Natachee, "and the next day I watched to see if the outlaws went to the Pardners. They did—they spent nearly two hours talking with Miss Hillgrove and her fathers. Then they went with Thad and Bob down to their mine, leaving the girl at the house. They were with the Pardners over an hour."

Hugh Edwards was greatly disturbed by what Natachee had learned. His first fear, that the stranger who had talked with him was an officer, was as nothing compared with his fear now for Marta. All night he pondered over the situation with scarce an hour of sleep. When morning came he told the Indian that he was going back to his old cabin to be near the girl—prison or no prison.

"But can't you see what a foolish move that would be?" asked Natachee. "The Pardners know who you are. If they have been, in the past, connected with Sonora Jack, which is very possible, they will turn you over to the sheriff in short order to protect both the outlaw and themselves. If that should happen either through them or through any one else, you certainly would be in no position to help Miss Hillgrove. You do not even know yet that

Miss Hillgrove is in danger. Sonora Jack will do nothing until he has satisfied himself about the lost mine, which brought him into this country at the risk of his life. You can depend on that. While he is searching for the mine I may be able to learn more of his interest in the Pardners and their girl. Be patient or you will spoil everything."

And Hugh, because he felt that Natachee for the time being was his ally, listened to his advice. The white man did not deceive himself as to the real reason for the Indian's interest in the situation. Nor did the red man make any pretenses. But even at that, Hugh felt that he would be better able ultimately to protect Marta, if for the present he fell in with the red man's plan to learn the exact nature of Sonora Jack's interest in the girl.

All that forenoon Natachee did not leave his cabin. But after their noonday meal he followed Hugh down into the gulch where, for a long time, he sat on a rock watching the white man at his work. Then he went back to the hut on the mountain side above.

When Edwards, a little before sunset, climbed the steep way from the place of his labor up to the cabin, the Indian was gone.

No second glance was needed to tell the white man that the cabin had been the scene of a terrific struggle.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE WAY OF A WHITE MAN

He was conscious of but one thing—a thing that was born of his white man's soul.

WITH a cry of dismay Hugh ran to the place where he kept hidden his hoard of gold. His pitifully small earnings were untouched. Natachee's bow and quiver of arrows, without which the Indian never left the cabin, were in their usual place. His hunting knife, which was always in his belt, was lying on the floor. It was not difficult for Hugh to guess what had happened.

Sonora Jack, unable with the help of his map to find the Mine with the Iron Door, and believing that Natachee knew the location of the treasure had sought the Indian to force him to reveal the secret. While Natachee was in the gulch with Edwards, Sonora Jack and his companions had entered the cabin, and waiting there had taken the Indian by surprise when he returned. The ground in front of the cabin was trampled by horses, and the tracks of their iron shoes were clear, leading away down the mountain toward the lower cañon. There was no doubt in Hugh's mind but that the outlaws had taken Natachee away with them. Without hesitation he set out to follow the tracks as fast as he

could in the failing light. He was wholly without experience in such matters, but the ground was soft from the winter rains and the three horses left a trail that was easy enough to follow.

When it became too dark to see, he was a mile or two from the cabin, well down on the steep slope of what he thought must be a spur of Samaniego Ridge. He had set out to follow the outlaws upon the impulse of the moment. In his excitement, he had not paused to think. But now, when he could no longer see the tracks, he was forced to stop and consider the situation with more deliberation.

Hugh Edwards realized that he was in every way but poorly equipped to meet such an emergency. What, he asked himself, could he do if he should succeed in finding the outlaws with their captive? If it had been a question of meeting Sonora Jack alone and bare-handed, he would have no reason to hesitate. Certainly he would not fear to face such an issue. Hugh Edwards was far from being either a weakling or a coward. But Sonora Jack was not alone. There were two others with him and they were undoubtedly well armed, while their desperate characters were clearly evidenced by their successful attack on Natachee. Hugh smiled grimly and touched the weapon at his side as he recalled how he had said to Natachee:

"I could not hit a flock of barns."

After all, why should he concern himself with Natachee's affairs? The red man had never professed anything even approaching friendship for

him. For weeks the Indian had held him a prisoner and with all the cruelty and cunning of his savage fathers had tortured him. Why not abandon him now to his fate? Why not return to the hut, take what gold he had accumulated and make his way out of the country? But as quickly as these thoughts raced through his mind, Hugh Edwards dismissed them—Marta.

If Natachee had not told him of Sonora Jack's interest in the old prospectors and their partnership daughter it might, perhaps, have been possible for him to desert the Indian now. But in spite of his hatred for his tormentor, and in spite of the bitter, revengeful purpose which he knew inspired the red man's interest in his affairs and in the woman he loved, Hugh needed Natachee's help. Perhaps even now, at that very moment, the Indian was finding, through Sonora Jack, a key to the mystery of Marta Hillgrove's birth and parentage. At any cost he, Hugh Edwards, must find the outlaws and their captive.

But how? He could not go to Thad and Bob for help. Natachee had made the possible connection between the old prospectors and Sonora Jack too clear. Even if he could have found his way in the night to Marta's home, he would not dare appeal to them. Saint Jimmy—George Wheeler and his cowboys? It would be worse than useless for one of Hugh's inexperience to attempt to find his way such a distance through such a wild country in the darkness of the night. He realized hopelessly that he did not even know which way to start.

He decided at last that the only course possible for him was to wait with what patience he could for the morning, and then to continue following the tracks of the horses. He had barely reached this decision and settled down in the poor shelter of a manzanita bush to pass the long cold hours of discomfort and anxiety, when he saw, at some distance down the mountain from where he sat, a strange glow of light.

It was not a camp fire. It was too soft—too diffused. It was not like the light of that window which he had watched so many lonely hours. It was not so steady and it was nearer—much nearer. He could see the trees and bushes that fringed the top of a cliff. Why—that was it—the light was from below—there was a fire at the foot of that cliff. He could not see the fire itself because—why, of course—the cliff that was lighted from below was the other side of a narrow gorge. He was too far away, and the walls were too steep for him to see the bottom.

As quickly as possible, but with every care to make his movements noiseless, Hugh Edwards stole toward the light. In a few minutes, that seemed hours to him, he was close to the rim of the gorge. Lying flat on the ground, he crawled with even greater caution to the edge of the precipice, where through the fringe of grass and bushes he looked down.

The place was, as he had reasoned, a deep, narrow cañon with sheer walls of rock. The cliffs on the

side where he lay were fully fifty feet from base to rim, and for about a hundred years they formed a half circle, giving a width to the little cañon at that point of about the same distance. At one end of this natural amphitheater, where a creek came tumbling down over granite ledges and bowlders, a man with his arms outstretched could almost touch both walls of the hall-like passage. The lower end was wider, with no rocks to obstruct the entrance. Except for the creek which ran close to the foot of the cliff opposite the semicircular side where Hugh lay, the floor was smooth and level with a number of mesquite trees and several giant cottonwoods. It was in the more open center of this arena that Hugh Edwards saw a thing that made him catch his breath with a shuddering gasp, while his heart pounded and his hand went to the gun on his hip.

On a large, altar-shaped rock that had been dislodged from the walls above by some force of nature, Natachee lay bound. The Indian was on his back with his arms and legs drawn down and tied securely to the rock, so that, save for his head, he was held immovable, but with no rope across his body.

Sonora Jack stood beside the rock giving directions to his companions, the Lizard and a Mexican, who were looking after the fire. Nearer the entrance to the amphitheater were three saddle horses. On the opposite side of the open space about the rock, and beyond the fire, the men had placed their rifles against the trunk of a cottonwood. The eyes of the man on the rim of the cañon wall had barely noted

these details when Sonora Jack turned from his companions by the fire to Natachee.

"Well," he said, and every word carried distinctly to the man above, "how about it, Indio, you got something to say, yet?"

Natachee did not speak.

"You not want to tell, heh? All right, you're some bravo Indio, but you goin' to beg me to let you talk 'fore I get through with you. I got nothin' 'gainst you, but you know where that Mine with the Iron Door is an' sure as fire is hot you're goin' to lead me to it. I don't come all the way up here from Mexico City just for nothin'. You show me the old mine, an' you can put in the rest of your years growin' old nice an' easy. If you don't—" he paused significantly, then called to his two helpers: "Put plenty mesquite on that fire, boys, we want plenty good red coals. This Indio here needs a little warmin' up, I think." Bending over his victim he said again: "Well, how 'bout it, you goin' to come through?"

Save for the glittering light in the dark eyes of the red man, the outlaw might have been talking to a stone image.

Enraged by the silent strength of that opposing will, Sonora Jack went closer to the Indian's side.

"Mebby you no sabe what I'm goin' to do to you. Mebby you think I got you here on this rock just for a bluff. Not much, I ain't. If you don't come across an' show me that mine, I'm goin' to put 'bout a hatful of them red coals right here." With his

open hand he slapped Natachee's naked chest. "You do what I say or I burn the red heart out of you, an' I ain't hurryin' the job neither. You ain't the first mule-head hombre I've made loosen up."

Hugh Edwards drew back from the edge of the cliff. For a single instant he was sick with horror. Then the blood of his race surged through his veins with tingling strength. In that moment it meant nothing to him that the man bound to the rock down there was an Indian. It made no difference that the red man, with cunning cruelty, had for weeks ingeniously tortured him to gratify a savage thirst for revenge against all white people. He did not, at the moment, even remember Marta and his need of Natachee's help. It mattered nothing that there were three of those fiends down there and that he was alone. He was conscious of but one thing: a thing that was born of his white man's soul. That deed of unspeakable brutality must not—should not—be accomplished.

Swiftly he made his way along the rim of the cañon toward the upper end of the semicircle. He felt as if he were acting in a dream, or as if some spirit over which he had no control dominated him. But even as he moved, a plan flashed before him, and he saw clearly every detail of the only part he could play with the slightest hope of success. The narrow passage through which the creek entered the amphitheater was hidden from the men by the deep shadows of the trees. Their rifles were on that side of the fire.

A short distance above the scene of the impending tragedy he found a place where he could descend, half sliding, half falling, to the creek, while the noise of the stream covered any sound from that direction. A moment more and he had let himself down over the rocks and bowlders, around which the waters roared, and stood behind the trunk of one of the giant cottonwoods, not a hundred feet from the outlaw and his companions. With sheer strength of will he restrained his impulse to rush forward and throw himself upon those fiends in human form as they bent over their fire.

He must wait. He must watch for the exact moment.

It was not long.

Sonora Jack, from the Indian's side, called to his companions:

"Ya chito tray la lumbre—bring the fire."

To Natachee, the outlaw said:

"One more time I ask you, Indio, are you goin' to take me to the mine?"

There was no answer.

The Lizard and the Mexican raked a quantity of live coals from the fire on to a flat rock.

Behind the tree, Hugh Edwards crouched in readiness.

The two men who were kneeling at the fire rose and started toward the Indian. Sonora Jack faced toward his victim. It was the moment for which the man behind the tree was waiting.

With all his strength, Hugh Edwards ran for the

tree against which the three rifles were standing. He reached his goal at the same instant that the men with the coals of fire arrived at the rock.

With a shout, Hugh began emptying his revolver in the general direction of the outlaws.

The Lizard, with a scream of terror, ran for the horses. The Mexican and Sonora Jack, under the combined shock of that fusillade of shots from the direction of their rifles, with those accompanying yells and the Lizard's screaming flight, leaped for the safety of their mounts. The horses in their fright added to the confusion.

Dropping his revolver and snatching two of the rifles, Hugh ran forward to the Indian. By the time Sonora Jack and his companions had succeeded in mounting their struggling horses, he had cut the ropes that bound Natachee, and the Indian and the white man, from the shelter of the rock, were firing into the shadowy group of plunging animals and cursing men.

As the outlaws disappeared in the darkness beyond the entrance to the amphitheater, Natachee caught his rescuer by the arm:

"Quick, we must get out of this light before Sonora Jack gets hold of himself."

Swiftly he led the way up the creek.

An hour later, in the Indian's cabin, Natachee stood before his white companion. With an expression which Hugh Edwards had never before seen on that dark countenance, the red man spoke in the manner of his people.

"Before the winter snows came, a white rabbit was caught by an Indian fox. The snows are gone and the rabbit has become a mountain lion. Why has the lion saved his enemy, the fox, from Sonora Jack's fire?"

"Why," stammered Hugh, "I—I—really, you know, I couldn't do anything else. I saw the light, then I saw what those devils were going to do, and—well—I simply couldn't stand for it."

"I, Natachee the Indian, have no claim on you, a white man. I have been your enemy. I am an enemy to all of your blood. I have tortured you in every way I knew. I would have continued to torture you."

"That has nothing to do with it," retorted Hugh coldly. "I didn't do what I did because I thought you were my friend."

The Indian smiled with grave dignity.

"The live oak never drops its leaves like the cottonwood. The pine never blossoms like the palo verde. A coyote in the skin of a bear would still act like a coyote. A deer never forgets that it is not a wolf. You, Hugh Edwards, saved me, your enemy, from the coals of fire, because you could not forget your nature—because you could not forget that you are a white man. I, Natachee, will not forget that I am an Indian."

With these words he bowed his head and, turning, went to take his bow and quiver of arrows from beside the fireplace.

Standing in the doorway, he spoke again:

"I must go. Sonora Jack will not come here again to-night. If he should, I will be near. Sleep in peace. When I return I will have something to tell you."

All that following day, Hugh Edwards watched for another visit from Sonora Jack and his companions, and waited with no little anxiety for Natachee's return.

But the outlaws did not come again. It was a little after noon the second day when the Indian finally appeared. He was driving four burros equipped with packsaddles.

When Hugh expressed surprise at sight of the pack animals, Natachee offered no explanation. In stolid silence the Indian prepared his dinner. He ate as if he had not touched food for many hours. When he had finished he said simply:

"I must sleep. In two hours I will awaken. Then we will talk. Do not go away from the cabin, please. Watch! If you see anything moving on the mountain side, call me."

He threw himself on his couch and almost instantly was sound asleep.

Hugh Edwards, sitting just outside the cabin door, waited.

A gentle wind breathed through the trees of juniper and live oak and cedar and sighed among the cliffs and crags; and from below, faint and far away, came the murmur of the distant creek. He saw the sunlight, warm on the green of the cottonwoods and

willows in the Cañon of Gold. He watched the cloud shadows drifting across the mountain slopes and ridges and, looking up to the high peaks, saw the somber pines against the blue of the sky.

A rock wren from a bowlder near by observed him with friendly eye and bobbed a cheerful greeting, and a painted redstart swung on a cat-claw bush. From somewhere on the side of the gulch where he worked came the exquisitely finished song of a grosbeak. The towering cliffs behind the cabin echoed the hoarse croaking call of a raven and now and then there was a flash of black and white and a bulletlike whiz, as a company of white-throated swifts shot past.

But no human thing moved within the range of his vision.

As he watched, he pondered the meaning of the Indian's manner. The red man had often remained silent for days at a time. But now, under the peculiar circumstances, Hugh felt that there was an unusual significance in Natachee's native reticence. What had the Indian been doing? Where had he been? What had he learned? What was the meaning of those four burros?

The deep voice of the Indian broke in upon his thoughts. Natachee was standing in the doorway.

CHAPTER XXV

THE WAYS OF GOD

"Listen carefully now and hear with your heart what I, Natachee, shall say."

THE Indian spoke with that strange dignity of mingled pride and pathos that so often moved the white man to pity:

"Hugh Edwards, the mountain streams that are born up there among those peaks are obedient to the will of Him from whose hand the snows fall. From their cradles among the roots of the pines, they start for the sea that lies many days beyond that faint blue line yonder, where the earth and the sky become one. Nor is there any doubt but that the waters, in the end, reach the appointed place for which they set out. But how or when, no mortal can say, for the creeks are forced to change their plans. The clearly marked trail upon which they first set out comes to an end. The waters that run with such noisy strength down the mountains slopes sink into the desert, and are lost forever to human eyes.

"It is so with the plans of men. The will of Him who sets the unknown ways by which these mountain waters shall reach the sea determines also the unknown ways that men shall go through this life, even to that place where the spirit's journey ends.

The trail, which at first is so clearly marked, sinks from sight and is lost in a desert of things which no mortal can know.

"I, Natachee, in following the trail of my destiny, have come to such a place. The course which lay before me as plain as the bed of a mountain stream is changed. I can no longer go the way I had planned. I am an Indian. You have said many times that I am a devil—good. Under certain circumstances every man is a devil. Change the circumstances and the devil becomes something else. Listen carefully now and hear with your heart what I, Natachee, shall say.

"Sonora Jack and his Mexican have left the home of the Lizard, but the Lizard has gone with them. The three are camped in the foothills a few miles from the home of the Pardners and their girl. They are hiding there because they do not know how many there were in the party that rescued me. It was well that you made so much noise. But Sonora Jack will not hide long. When he is sure that he is not being followed by a posse, he will move. But he will not again attempt to find the Mine with the Iron Door. He fears to stay longer in the Cañon of Gold lest he be prevented from carrying out some other plan. I could not learn what that other plan is. I know only that it concerns Marta Hillgrove and the Pardners. Whatever Sonora Jack plans, it is not good. We must go at once that we may protect your woman."

Hugh Edwards spoke as one who finds it hard to believe what he has heard:

"You say that *we* must go—that we must protect Marta? Do you mean that you will help me to save her from whatever threatens through this Sonora Jack?"

Natachee bowed his head for a moment, then met the white man's eyes proudly.

"Did I not say that the trail which I, Natachee, was following had suddenly changed as the course of a mountain stream is lost in the desert sands? When Sonora Jack and his companions caught me and tied me with their ropes to that rock, I was as helpless as a dove in the coils of a snake. Do you think that I, Natachee, would have weakened under their torture fire? Sonora Jack would have burned the heart out of the Indian's breast but he never would have heard from the Indian's lips the secret of the Mine with the Iron Door. It is not a new thing for an Indian to be tortured for gold. I, Natachee, would have died as so many of my fathers have died, without a word. But you, a white man, obedient to your strange white man's nature, offered your own life to save the life of Natachee the Indian, who had for months been torturing you. The trail of hatred and revenge that lay so clear before the red man is lost in the strange desert of the white man's ways. I, Natachee, cannot understand, but who am I to disobey? The life you saved belongs to you, Hugh Edwards. I, Natachee, am yours until I pay the debt. Can the heart of the white man understand?"

The Indian, with an earnestness that left no

doubt of his sincerity, offered his hand. And Hugh Edwards, though he did not yet realize the full significance of the Indian's words, gladly accepted the proffered friendship, saying as he grasped the Indian's hand:

"I am more than glad you feel that way about it, Natachee, but really, old man, I'm afraid you overrate what I did. I can't believe yet that those fellows would have dared to go the limit with you. They might have burned you pretty bad, I'll grant, but——"

At the touch of the white man's hand and the hearty comradeship of his words, Natachee dropped his Indian manner and became the Natachee of the white man's schools. Smiling, he said:

"It is evident, my friend, that you do not know Sonora Jack and his methods. I hope for your sake that if you are ever introduced to him you will kill him before he can identify you as the man who blocked his way, as he thinks, to the treasure which brought him from Mexico at such a risk.

"But no more of this," he added. "We have work to do. I went to see Doctor Burton and told him everything—everything except of our visit to the mine. Together we made a plan and he bade me assure you of Marta's love and tell you how glad he was for you. Then I called on the Pardners as the Doctor and I had agreed was best. They knew no more of Sonora Jack than every one who lives in this part of Arizona knows. I explained to the old prospectors and their girl why you had disappeared

and how you had been hiding with me this winter. I told them of your innocence of the crime for which you are under sentence—of your love for Marta—of your efforts to find the gold that would enable you to leave the country and take her with you. I leave you to imagine the girl's happiness. She would have come to you with me but I would not permit it. I promised her that instead to-morrow you should go to her."

Hugh Edwards, in a fever of longing and anxiety, paced to and fro.

"But why to-morrow?" he cried. "Why not now—this moment? Who can say what may happen while we wait?"

Natachee answered:

"We have work to do first. Listen—you are not safe for a day, once you show yourself again. The lizard has talked too much as I told you he would. Your disappearance set everybody to wondering, then to questioning and guessing. You can only save yourself and Marta by leaving the country before the sheriff learns that you are here and before Sonora Jack can carry out his plan, whatever it is. Doctor Burton will have everything arranged. To-morrow you will go."

"But—but"—stammered Hugh—"I have no money. There is not gold enough to buy even my own way out of the country, much less to take Marta with me."

The Indian laughed.

"I told them you had struck the rich pocket that

you have been working so hard to find. Bob and Thad loaned me those burros there to bring down the gold. The Pardners will cash your gold as if they had found it in their own little mine. Doctor Burton and I planned it all. He will advance money for your immediate needs until your own gold is in the bank."

"But I tell you I have no gold."

"You forget," returned the Indian calmly, "the Mine with the Iron Door."

When it was dark, Natachee said:

"Come, we must not lose an hour."

Taking one of the burros with a number of ore sacks which he had brought from the Pardners, the Indian led the way down into the gulch where he put Hugh's pick on the packsaddle. Then tying the cloth over the white man's eyes and placing one end of the rope in his hand, he went on; Hugh, in turn, leading the burro. When they arrived near the entrance to the mine, they left the pack animal and went into the tunnel.

Removing the cloth from his companion's eyes, Natachee said:

"You shall remain here to dig the gold. I will carry it out to the burro and take it to the cabin. I trust you not to leave this spot until I am ready to take you back as we came."

Hugh laughed.

"You may trust me. I'll promise not to put my head out even. I'll be too busy to waste any time investigating."

"Good!" said the Indian and the two men fell to work.

All night long, Hugh Edwards toiled with his pick, while Natachee sorted the ore, selecting only the richest pieces of quartz for the sacks. As fast as the sacks were filled, he carried them from the mine and packed them on the burro. When they had a load, the Indian led the pack animal away, to return later for another. It was a full two hours before daybreak when Natachee announced that they had taken out all that the four burros could carry. With this last load he led Hugh out of the mine and back to the cabin. Then, while the white man prepared breakfast, the Indian went once more to the mine to destroy every evidence of their visit and to obliterate every sign of the tracks they had made going and returning. When he again appeared at the cabin, the gray light of the coming day shone above the crest of the mountains. With the four burros loaded with the precious ore, the two men set out for the Pardners' home in the lower cañon.

They had reached a point on Samaniego Ridge above the house when Natachee, who was leading the way, stopped suddenly with a low exclamation.

"What is the matter?" cried Hugh.

The Indian motioned for the white man to come to his side. Silently he pointed down at the little house on the floor of the cañon below.

"Well, what is it—what is the matter—what do you see?" said Hugh, gazing at the familiar scene.

"There is no one there," returned the Indian in a low voice, "no one about the house—the door is closed—no one at the mine—no horse in the corral—no smoke from the chimney. And see," he pointed to three buzzards that were circling about the yard in the rear of the house. While they looked, another huge bird joined the group, and then another.

With a cry, Hugh Edwards started forward, but Natachee caught him by the arm.

"Wait, you do not know who may be watching for you to come—wait."

Quickly the Indian led the burros into a little hollow that was fringed with thick bushes, where he tied them securely. Then showing Hugh where to lie in a clump of manzanita so that he could watch the vicinity of the house below, the red man disappeared in the brush.

For what seemed hours to him, Hugh Edwards waited with his eyes fixed on the scene below. There was no movement—no sign of life about the little house. The Indian had disappeared as if the earth had swallowed him. The company of buzzards increased until there were eight or ten now wheeling above the silent dwelling.

The watching man had almost reached the limit of his patience, when to his amazement the front door of the house was thrown open and Natachee stepped out.

The Indian signaled his companion to come, and Hugh plunged with reckless haste down the steep side of the ridge.

The old prospector, Thad Grove, was lying on his bed unconscious from a blow that had cut a deep gash on the side of his head. Natachee had found him on the floor in front of the door to Marta's room. At the end of the living room, opposite the door to the girl's chamber, Sonora Jack's Mexican companion was lying on the floor severely wounded. Though unable to move, the man was conscious and his eyes followed the Indian with the look of a crippled animal at bay.

The body of the other Pardner was lying in a queer twisted heap in the yard, halfway between the kitchen door and the barn.

Marta was gone.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE TRAGEDY

—signs, which were as clear to the Indian as the words on a printed page.

AT first, when his mind was able to grasp the terrible facts of the tragedy, Hugh Edwards nearly lost control of himself. But Natachee steadied him. The Indian assured him with such confidence that Marta was in no immediate danger that he took heart again.

"The girl is worth too much money to Sonora Jack for him to harm her," continued Natachee. "He has carried her away, yes, but remember we know that he expects somehow to make a fortune through her. You may depend upon it he will take every care to keep her safe."

"But how can you know?" said Hugh, wondering at the certainty of the red man's words.

The Indian answered quickly:

"Because the outlaw, even in his haste, was careful to take the girl's things with her." He led his companion into the girl's room. "Look—this closet is nearly empty. The drawers of this dresser are all pulled out and there is almost nothing left in them. Her toilet articles even are not here. There are no blankets left on this bed. I tell you there is much

for you to hope for yet, my friend, if you can make yourself as cool and self-controlled as I know you are brave."

When they had returned to the room where the old prospector lay, the Indian, after bending over the unconscious man for a moment, turned again to Hugh; slowly he said:

"There is no night so dark but there is a little light for those whose eyes are good. Always one can see the mountain peaks against the sky. The Mexican there will not talk, and I have not yet looked about outside the house, but some things are very clear. This happened last night, because there are still a few coals among the ashes in the kitchen stove and the clock was wound as usual. Sonora Jack will go to Mexico—he does not dare remain in the United States where there is a reward out for him. At the best possible time, it will take him two days to reach the line. He will not travel with his woman prisoner by daylight. That he expects to lay up during the day is shown by his taking every particle of food he could find in the house. It is not likely that he got started before midnight. With the girl's clothing, the bedding, the provisions, and his own things, he must have taken a pack animal. Good! I, Natachee, will follow a trail like that as fast as a horse can run."

Hugh Edwards put his hand on the Indian's arm.

"We can get horses and men at Wheeler's," he said quickly. "It ought not to take an hour to

raise a posse. We can telephone the sheriff from the ranch. Come on."

He started toward the door but the calm voice of the Indian checked him.

"You forget. This is no time for you to meet the sheriff. No one but Doctor Burton and his mother must know of this, until you are safe out of the country."

"I am a fool, Natachee, I forgot. Tell me what to do."

For a moment the Indian again bent over the unconscious man on the bed, then he said:

"We cannot leave Thad like this. He must have a doctor. I am going to bring the Burtons. While I am away, you must not leave the old man's side. He might regain consciousness for a moment and you must be ready to hear anything that he can tell you. And keep your eye on that Mexican snake out there in the other room. He is the kind that may try something desperate to keep Thad from ever speaking again, for the old prospector is the only one who can tell us exactly what happened here last night. Do you understand?"

"I do," returned Hugh. "You can trust me."

A moment later the Indian was running up the cañon trail toward the little white house on the mountain side.

Two hours later Natachee returned with Saint Jimmy and Mother Burton, who were riding and carrying on their horses a supply of food.

While Doctor Burton with his mother and Hugh

were doing all that could be done for Thad and for the wounded Mexican, Natachee, with the swiftness and certainty of a well-bred hunting dog, examined every foot of the ground in the vicinity of the house, the barn and the corral.

When the Indian was satisfied that he could learn nothing more, he climbed swiftly up the steep side of the cañon to the spot where he and Hugh had left the four burros with their heavy loads of gold. Edwards was just coming from the house when Natachee, leading the burros, arrived at the gate. Together the two men took the animals with their precious burdens down into the creek bottom and across to the Pardners' little mine, where they hurriedly buried the sacks of gold in the dump at the mouth of the tunnel.

And then—not far from the house, between two wide-spreading mesquite trees, where a pair of cardinals had their nest and mocking birds loved to swing and sing in the moonlight, where anemone and sweet peas and evening primroses never failed to bloom, the white man and the Indian dug a grave.

There was no time to secure a coffin. They dared not make any public announcement now, nor wait for any formal ceremony. With tender hands they wrapped the old-timer in his blankets and gently laid him in his resting place. And who shall say that Mother Burton's simple prayer was not as potent before that One who judges not by pomp and ceremony, as any ritual ordained by church or creed? And who shall say that the old

prospector himself would not have wished it to be done just that way? As Saint Jimmy said gently:

"After all, it is not the first time that Bob has slept on the ground."

While Mrs. Burton was preparing a hurried dinner, Natachee told Hugh and Saint Jimmy the story of the tragedy, as he had read it from the tracks about the premises—signs which were as clear to the Indian as the words on a printed page.

"There were three of them," said Natachee. "They came from down the cañon. It was after everybody in the house was sleeping, because Sonora Jack would not start from where he was hiding in his camp until after dark. The third man was the Lizard. They left their horses and a pack mule at the gate. The marks of the Lizard's feet, where he dismounted, are very clear. Jack and the Mexican went to the corner of the house there at the back. They crouched close to the ground against the wall so they would not be seen easily in the dark, and waited, while the Lizard went to the barn and frightened the pinto so that the noise would waken the Pardners and cause one of them to come out to see what was the matter with the horse.

"Bob came out by the kitchen door and started for the barn. He did not see the men who were behind the corner of the house. When the old prospector was halfway to the barn, Jack and the Mexican ran upon him from behind. Bob fought them but he had no chance. Perhaps he called to

Thad. I think not, however, from what happened in the house. Either Jack or the Mexican killed him with a knife, because the Lizard would not have had time to come from the barn.

"Then the Lizard went to stand guard at the front of the house to prevent Marta from escaping by that door, and to give warning in case any one should come. His tracks are there by the porch. The two outlaws went into the house by the kitchen door. Thad probably had also been awakened by the noise at the barn, and while waiting for Bob to come back must have heard Jack and the Mexican. He was trying to prevent them from entering Marta's room when he shot the Mexican, and Sonora Jack struck him down.

"The Lizard, I think, is with Jack and the girl. He seems to have turned his own horse loose and taken the Mexican's. Marta is riding her pinto. They have taken the pack mule."

As Natachee finished, Mrs. Burton called them to dinner.

While they were eating, the Indian asked the Doctor about Thad's condition.

"I cannot say yet, as to his complete recovery," returned Saint Jimmy, "but I feel reasonably sure that he will pull through all right. I am quite certain that he will regain consciousness for a time at least. But the Mexican has no chance. He will live for several days, perhaps, but the end is certain."

"Good!" said Natachee. "You and Mrs. Burton will stay here until Edwards and I return, will you?"

"Indeed we will," returned Mother Burton quickly.

"Good!" said the Indian again. "We should be back the morning of the fourth day."

He looked at Doctor Burton inquiringly.

"We will save time getting started if we take your horses. The Pardners' horses are out on the range somewhere—and to go to Wheeler's for help would mean the sheriff."

"They are yours. Take them, of course," said Doctor Burton and his mother in a breath.

"We will take a little food for to-night and to-morrow," continued the Indian, "and a canteen of water. With a little grain for the horses and the Pardners' guns, that will be all, except"— he smiled grimly—"my bow and arrows."

CHAPTER XXVII

ON THE TRAIL

What madness to think that Natachee could ever find them in that seemingly infinite space.

THE trail, left by Sonora Jack, led Edwards and Natachee down the creek and out of the cañon by the old road. But a mile or two beyond the crossing, the outlaw had left the road for a course more to the west through the foothills. And here, in the soft ground where there were no other tracks, the marks of the horse's iron-shod feet were very clear, even to the white man. But when Edwards would have urged his mount forward, the Indian checked him.

"There are many miles of desert ahead of us, my friend," said Natachee. "I must not permit your impatience to rob us of our horses before our journey is half finished."

Reluctantly Edwards restrained himself, and the Indian, riding a little in advance, set the pace.

They had not gone far when Natachee pulled up his horse, and springing from his saddle, held up his hand for his companion to stop.

"What is it?" asked Edwards. "What is the matter?"

The Indian, who was moving here and there as he

studied the ground, did not answer until he was apparently satisfied with his examination of the tracks.

As he came back to his waiting horse, he said:

"They stopped here and the men dismounted to tighten the cinches. I was right about the Lizard. Those tracks there are his, and there are the tracks of his horse. Sonora Jack and his horse are over there. When the men had attended to their saddles, the Lizard went to look after the pack mule over there, while Jack went to the horse that stood there, which must have been the pinto. Now that we have identified the horses with their riders, we can follow the movements of each in case they should separate —unless, of course, they should change horses."

Again the Indian was in his saddle and they went on. At times they rode at a fast walk, again their sturdy mounts put mile after mile behind them with the easy swinging lope of the cow horse. Occasionally Natachee reined in his mount and, bending low from the saddle, studied the trail carefully, but he never hesitated for more than a moment or two.

At first, after leaving the old road, the trail led them straight west, but just before they crossed the Bankhead Highway they turned a little to the south, so as to pass the southern end of the Tortollita range. And here in the harder ground, and among the rocks, the trail became more difficult. Also, as Natachee had foreseen, the outlaw had separated his party; sending the Lizard with the pack mule one way while he with Marta went another. The

Indian, explaining to Edwards what had happened, held to Nugget's tracks.

And now, as he proceeded, the outlaw had taken every precaution to throw any possible pursuer off his trail. Choosing the hardest ground, he had turned and twisted, doubled back and forth, riding over ledges of rock, avoiding soft spots of ground, and taking advantage of everything in his course that would be an obstacle in the way of any one attempting to follow. At the same time, he had moved steadily toward the west and south.

Edwards, in dismay, felt that all hope of rescuing Marta was lost. To his eyes there was no mark to show which way they had gone. But Natachee smiled.

Dismounting, and giving his bridle rein to his companion, the Indian went ahead, stooping low at times and moving slowly, again running confidently at a dog trot. Three times he caused Edwards to wait while he drew a wide circle and picked up the trail at some point further on. Where Hugh could see not the slightest mark to show that a living thing had passed that way, the Indian moved forward with a certainty that was, to the white man, almost supernatural. A tiny scratch on a rock, a pebble brushed from its resting place, was enough to mark the way for the Indian as clearly as if it were a paved street. It was late in the afternoon when the trail finally drew away from the Tortollitas and again lay clearly marked in the softer ground of the desert. And here, presently, Natachee pointed out

to Edwards that the tracks of the Lizard's horse and the pack mule had again merged with those of the animals ridden by Sonora Jack and his captive.

The sun had set when Natachee stopped his horse. There was still light to see the trail but it would last but a few minutes longer. For some time the Indian seemed lost in contemplation of the scene. Slowly his eyes swept the vast reaches of desert and the mountain ranges that lay before them. His companion waited.

At last Natachee said:

"Sonora Jack is going to Mexico. If he were not, he would have gone to the north of the Tortollitas back there. But Mexico lies there to the south and this trail is leading almost due west."

"What can we do?" cried Edwards. "It will be dark in twenty minutes, we cannot follow the trail in the night."

"Patience," returned the Indian, "and listen. The ways by which one may go through these deserts and mountains are more or less fixed." Pointing to the southwest where the ragged sky-line of the Tucson range was sharp against the glowing sky, he continued:

"The outlaw would not risk going straight south on this side of those hills because that is the thickly settled valley of the Santa Cruz with the city of Tucson to bar his way. Do you see, through that gap in the Tucson range, a domelike peak of another range beyond?"

"Yes."

"Well, that is Baboquivari. The Baboquivari, the Coyote, the Roskruge, and the Waterman Mountains are in a line north and south with the Pozo Verdes at the southern end of the line extending into Mexico. On this side of those ranges the country is rather well covered by cattle ranches and the main road to San Fernando, Sasabe and Mexico, and there is a custom house on the line. I do not think Sonora Jack would go that way.

"On the other side of that line of mountains lies the thinly settled Papago Indian Reservation. If this trail here continues its course to the west, it will pass north of those Waterman Mountains which are at the northern end of that line of ranges which mark the eastern boundary of the reservation. The Vaca Hills in the Papago country lie just beyond. They are surrounded by barren desert. There are no ranches—no roads. There is no place in all this country more lonely, and there is a little water there. Sonora Jack could have reached the Vaca Hills by daybreak this morning. If he spent this day there, he will turn south from that point and will be making his way to-night through the Papago Reservation to the Mexican line. I have heard that his old headquarters were in Mexico, south of the Nariz and Santa Rosa Mountains, which are on the border.

"But if I am wrong, and he went south on this side of the Baboquivaris, then he has gone through the Tucson range by the pass at Picture Rocks and we will find his trail there. Come!"

By midnight, they were at Picture Rocks—a nar-

row cut through the Tucson Mountains where the rock walls of the pass are covered with the strange picture writings of a prehistoric people. At places, the winding passageway is scarcely wider than the tracks of a wagon, so that it was not difficult for the Indian, by the light of an improvised torch, to assure himself that Sonora Jack had not gone that way.

With his customary exclamation, "Good!" the Indian swung into his saddle and, leaving the Tucson Mountains behind, pushed out into the desert with the sureness of a sailor steering toward a harbor light. And now, through the darkness of the night, he set a pace that taxed the endurance of the horses. The white man followed blindly.

Before they were out of the pass, Hugh had lost all sense of direction. In the desert, the darkness seemed to close in about them like a wall. The shadowy form of the Indian, the ghostly shapes of the desert vegetation, and the weird emptiness of those wide houseless spaces, gave him a feeling of unreality. Vainly he strained his eyes to glimpse a light. There was no light. Save for the soft thud of the horses' feet, the squeaking of the saddle leathers and the jingle of the bridle chains, there was no sound. He felt that it must all be a dream from which presently he would awake. And somewhere under those same cold stars that looked down with such indifference, Marta, too, was riding—riding. Where was the outlaw leading her and to what end? Where was she at that moment? What madness to

think that Natachee could ever find them in that seemingly infinite space.

After a time, which to Hugh seemed an age, they were again riding among the lower hills of a small desert range. Another half hour and Natachee stopped. Slipping to the ground and giving his bridle rein to Edwards, he said:

"We are at the northern end of the Waterman range. If they went to the Vaca Hills, they came this way. We will pick up their trail at daylight. There is water not far from here. Wait until I return."

As noiseless as a shadow, the Indian disappeared.

Hugh Edwards, peering into the darkness, tried to guess which way the Indian had gone. He listened. On every side the mysteries of the desert night drew close. The shadowy bulk of the hills against the stars assumed the shapes of gigantic and awful creatures of some other world. The smell of the desert—the low sigh of a passing breath of air—the stillness—the feel of the wide empty spaces touched him with a strange dread. The wild, weird call of a coyote startled him. Faint and far away, the call was answered. The lonesome cry of an owl was followed by the soft swish of unseen wings. Suddenly, as if he had risen from the ground, Natachee again stood at his horse's shoulder.

"It is all right," said the Indian as he mounted, "there is no one at the water hole. We will camp there until daylight."

After watering their horses and giving them a feed

of grain, the two men ate a cold lunch and lay down to rest until the morning. Natachee slept, but his white companion lay with wide-open eyes waiting for the light.

With the first touch of gray in the sky behind the distant Catalinas, the Indian awoke. By the time there was light enough to see, they were in the saddle.

They had not gone far when Natachee reined his horse toward the west and pointing to the ground said:

"They went here, see? And yonder are the Vaca Hills."

They were nearing the group of low hills that on every side is surrounded by unbroken desert when Natachee, with a low exclamation, suddenly stopped, and, standing in his stirrups, gazed intently ahead.

"What is it?" asked Hugh, trying in vain to see what it was that had attracted the red man's attention.

"A horse."

As he spoke, the Indian slipped from his saddle and motioned the white man to dismount.

Leading the animals behind a large greasewood bush, Natachee said to his companion:

"Stay here with the horses and watch."

Before Hugh could answer, the Indian had slipped away through the gray-green desert vegetation.

A half hour passed. Hugh Edwards watched until his eyes ached. From horizon to horizon there was no sign of life. The desert was as still as

a tomb. Then he saw Natachee standing on one of the hills against the sky. The Indian was signaling Hugh to come.

When the white man joined his companion, the Indian did not reply to his eager questions, and Hugh wondered at the red man's grim and scowling face. Silently, Natachee mounted and started his horse forward.

Presently they rode into a low depression between the hills and Natachee called Hugh's attention to the water hole and the place where the outlaw had made camp. Pointing out that the trail from this camping place led south, the Indian said:

"They left here as soon as it was dark last night. They are now close to the border. Sonora Jack will not camp another day on this side of the line but will push on this morning into Mexico. We will make much better time to-day than they could have made last night."

"But that horse—what about that horse you saw?" demanded Hugh.

For a moment, although he stopped, Natachee did not answer. Then, as if against his will, he said curtly:

"Ride to the top of that ridge there and you will see."

Wonderingly, Hugh obeyed.

On the farther side of the ridge lay the body of the Lizard.

Not until the following day did Hugh Edwards understand why the red man's face was so grim, and why he would not speak of the Lizard's death.

Hour after hour the Indian and the white man followed the trail that led southward through the Papago country. Natachee set the pace, nor did he once stop or hesitate, for the tracks of the two horses and the pack mule were clear in the soft ground, and the outlaw had made no attempt to confuse possible pursuers.

Skirting the northern end of the Comobabi range, and leaving Indian Oasis well to the east, the trail avoided two small Indian villages that lie at the foot of the Quijotoas and then swung more to the west. Natachee, who for three hours had not spoken, pointed to a group of mountains miles ahead.

"The Santa Rosa and the Nariz Mountains on the Mexican line. Sonora Jack is making for the headquarters of his old outlaw band."

As mile after mile passed in steady, relentless succession, and the hours went by with no relief from the monotonous pound and swing of the horses' feet, Hugh Edwards found reason to be grateful for the past months of heavy labor that had toughened his muscles and hardened his body for this test of physical endurance. The sun rode in a sky that held no relieving cloud. In the wide basin, rimmed by desert mountains where no trees grew, there was not a shadow to rest his aching eyes. The smell of the sweating horses and the odor of warm, wet saddle leather was in every breath he drew. His lips were parched and cracked, his eyes smarted, his skin was grimy with dust, his clothing damp and sticky with perspiration. He felt that he had been

riding for ages. He grimly set his will to ride on and on and on.

It was late in the afternoon when Natachee turned aside from the trail and rode toward a little desert hill near-by. When Edwards, following, asked the reason, Natachee answered:

"We are not far from the border. Sonora Jack must have friends in this neighborhood or he would not have come so far west before crossing into Mexico."

Dismounting, the two men climbed to the top of the hill, and from that elevation scanned the surrounding country. When Natachee was satisfied, they returned to their horses and rode on. But now the Indian held to the trail only at the intervals necessary to assure himself of the general bearing of the outlaw's course. At every opportunity he ascended some high point from which he could survey the country into which the trail was leading them. After two hours of this they were rewarded by the sight of a small adobe house and corral, a mile, perhaps, from where they stood.

As Natachee pointed to the place he said:

"That is not Indian. The Papago Reservation line, which follows the international boundary for so many miles, turns north at the foot of the Nariz Hills yonder and then after a few miles turns west again to the Santa Rosa Mountains over there. That little ranch is not on the Indian Reservation. It cannot be far from the border. It looks Mexican, and the outlaw's trail leads directly toward it."

At the possibility suggested by the Indian's words, Hugh Edwards cried:

"Do you think—are they—is Marta there?"

Natachee shook his head.

"No, I think the outlaw would take her into Mexico, but whoever lives there, they are Sonora Jack's friends or he would avoid the place."

Then with his eyes on his white companion's face, the Indian said slowly:

"Don't you remember the story you told me—how the old prospectors found the little girl?"

"Yes," said Edwards, not at first seeing the connection.

"Well," continued Natachee, "have you forgotten that Thad and Bob were coming in from the Santa Rosa Mountains, and that they found the child at a Mexican Ranch near the border?"

Hugh Edwards, fully aroused now, was trembling with emotion. He gazed at the little ranch house in the distance as if fascinated. Then, without a word, he went hurriedly down the hill to his horse.

Natachee was beside him, and, as they mounted, the Indian spoke.

"We must be careful, friend, it will not do to show ourselves here. If I am not mistaken, we will pick up the trail again beyond that ranch on the south."

Riding into the nearest opening between the hills of the Nariz range, the Indian again turned westward, thus leaving the ranch well to the north. At the western end of the range they found the outlaw's trail leading straight south into Mexico.

When the sun went down, Natachee and Edwards, lying in the greasewood and mesquite on top of a low ridge a few miles south of the international boundary line, looked down upon the buildings and corrals of a Mexican Ranch.

The nearest corral was not more than a quarter of a mile distant. The fence of a small pasture which lay between them and the corrals was less than a hundred yards away. In this pasture, within a stone's throw of where the white man and the Indian lay, the pinto horse Nugget was feeding quietly with another horse and a mule.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE OUTLAWS

In reality, the ranch was a general meeting place, or station, for cattle rustlers, smugglers, and their kind, from both sides of the border.

ALL through these lonely months following the disappearance of Hugh Edwards, Marta Hillgrove had lived in the firm conviction that the man she loved would come again. She had nothing to justify her belief. She could not understand why, if he loved her, he had left no message—no word of hope. But her woman instinct had persistently swept aside all the opposing facts and held her to the truth which her heart knew. She was so sure of Hugh Edwards' love that nothing could shake her faith in him or cause her to doubt that he would come again to claim her. With Saint Jimmy's help she had endured the long days when there had been no word from the man to whom she had given, without reserve, the wealth of her first woman love.

Marta never dreamed what it cost Saint Jimmy to help her. She would never know. Many, many times Saint Jimmy had told himself that the girl must never know how hard it was for him to help her through those weeks of her waiting for Hugh Edwards.

Then, at last, Natachee had come with the explanation of Hugh's silence, the story of the hunted man's innocence of the crime for which he had been imprisoned, together with the promises of the freedom and happiness that was now, through the gold her lover had found, so near at hand for them both.

Every moment of that day her heart had sung: "To-morrow Hugh is coming. To-morrow he is coming." The hours were filled with rosy visions of the days, that were now so near, when she would be with him, with no fear of another separation. Again and again she assured herself that it was all true—that it was not another of her dreams. Hugh *had* found the gold that meant freedom for him, and happiness for them both. The Pardners, when they had talked with Saint Jimmy, were willing to do their part in carrying out the plan, as they would have been willing to submit to any hardship to insure the happiness of their daughter. Saint Jimmy was arranging everything. "To-morrow, to-morrow, Hugh would come."

There had been a long talk with her two fathers that evening, and when at last they had said good-night, the girl had not found it easy to sleep. She was too excited, too thrilled with her happiness. Her mind was too active with thoughts of what the morning would bring. She heard the noise at the barn and wondered what mischief Nugget was in. At the same moment she heard the Pardners stirring in their room, and knew that they too had been

disturbed by the noise that Nugget was making. The door of her room was open and she could hear Bob muttering about the pinto as he passed through the living room on his way out to the barn.

The noise at the barn ceased. She waited, listening for Bob's return.

There was the sound of steps in the kitchen and some one entered the living room. Thad moved in his room. She caught a whispered word outside her door. It was not Bob. What did it mean? Sitting up in her bed, she listened.

Suddenly all was confusion. Thad's voice rang out, challenging the intruders. There was a trampling rush of feet toward her door—a tangle of straining, writhing figures—a spurt of fire accompanied by the deafening report of a gun—a cry of pain—a dull, sickening blow—a moaning voice: "Hay mamacita de me vido"—a dreadful silence.

Then another voice spoke sharply in Mexican, followed by a groaning reply; and then a man stood beside her bed telling her that she must prepare to go with him and assuring her that no harm should come to her if she was obedient and made no effort to escape. Dumb with terror, the girl started to dress and Sonora Jack went back to the wounded Mexican. Marta heard him call to the Lizard to bring up the horses and the pack mule, and to saddle the pinto. But when the outlaw went again to the girl he found her kneeling beside Thad, overcome with grief.

Lifting her to her feet, Sonora Jack said sternly:

"Come, this is no good! The old man, he will be all right when he wake up. You do what I say an' make yourself ready to ride your own horse with me, or I finish him an' pack you on a mule."

He drew a knife and stooped over the old prospector.

With a cry, Marta sprang to do his bidding.

In those first hours of her enforced ride in the night with Sonora Jack and the Lizard, the girl was still too bewildered and frightened to think clearly. But when the outlaw ordered the Lizard to take the pack mule and go one way, while he with Marta went another, in order to confuse any possible pursuers, she caught, from her captors' words and actions, a gleam of hope. Hugh Edwards and Natachee would arrive at her home in the morning. They would not be long in setting out to find her. With this hope, and the assurance from the outlaws' manner toward her that she was in no immediate personal danger, the girl's courage returned and she was able to consider her situation with some degree of calmness. She did not know that Bob had been killed. But certainly he had not returned after being called from the house by that noise at the barn; nor had she heard his voice. This, together with the fact that neither Sonora Jack nor the Lizard had mentioned the old prospector or referred to him in any way, led her to believe that he was dead. She could not know how seriously Thad was hurt. Try as she might, she could find no hint of the outlaw's

purpose in taking her away. When the Lizard would have talked to her, Sonora Jack ordered him, curtly, to keep his mouth shut and look after the pack mule.

Morning came and they were in the Vaca Hills. When Sonora Jack and the Lizard had made camp, and breakfast was over, the outlaw ordered the girl to rest and sleep because there was a long hard ride before her and she would need all her strength. Then, telling the Lizard that he would call him later to take his turn watching for any one following on their trail, Sonora Jack went to the top of a hill, from which he could overlook the country to the east.

No sooner had his leader left the camp than the Lizard approached Marta.

With a leering grin twisting his ratlike features, he said:

"You're a-ridin' with me after all, ain't ye?"

The girl, making no effort to hide her disgust, did not answer.

"Still a-feelin' high an' mighty, be ye? Wal, you'd best be a-gettin' over hit. You're a long way from th' Cañada del Oro right now an' you're a-goin' a heap further."

Marta forced herself to ask calmly:

"Do you know where we are going?"

The Lizard looked back at the hill toward which the outlaw had gone.

"I know whar Sonora Jack *says* we're a-goin'—whether we go er not depends on you."

"What do you mean?" faltered Marta.

"What do ye reckon I'm here a-mixin' up in this fer?" retorted the Lizard.

"I—I am sure I don't know."

"Oh, ye don't, don't ye? Can't even make a guess, heh? Wal, I'll tell ye, hit's like this: Sonora Jack, he's a-aimin' t' carry ye into Mexico. He 'lows he knows whar ther's a feller what'll be glad t' pay an almighty fancy price fer a likely lookin' gal like you an' he's goin' t' sell ye. Onct he's south of th' border, he kin work it easy enough. He's a-takin' good care of ye 'cause he's got t' deliver ye in first-class shape. Onct yer delivered an' th' other feller has paid Jack's price—wal, I reckon you'll be made t' earn yer livin' all right, an' pay right smart on yer owner's investment besides."

The explanation of the outlaw's purpose in abducting her was so plausible that Marta was stricken with horror.

After a moment the Lizard spoke again, emphasizing his words with significant care.

"That's what Jack *thinks* he's a-goin' t' do. Jist like he *thinks* I come along t' help him."

The girl caught the fellow's suggestion with desperate eagerness.

"But you won't help him—you—you couldn't do such a thing. You came to save me."

Then, as she saw the expression of the Lizard's face, her voice broke and she faltered:

"That is what you mean, isn't it?"

"What I mean depends on you. When Sonora

Jack wanted me t' come along an' help him git you into Mexico, I seen th' chanct I been a long time waitin' fer. Hit'd be plumb easy t' git shet of that half-breed Mex anywhere this side of th' line. With th' outfit we got, you an' me could make hit on west t' Yuma an' California easy."

The girl was watching him as if she were under a spell. The look in his shifty eyes, the expression of his loose mouth fascinated her.

"But," he added deliberately, "you'll have t' go as my woman."

With a low cry, the girl hid her face:

"No! no!! no!!!"

"You kin take your choice. I'll help Sonora Jack sell ye t' that feller in Mexico er ye kin go with me."

Then the girl's overstrained nerves gave way. Springing to her feet, she broke into wild laughter.

The hysterical merriment with which she received his proposal maddened the Lizard beyond reason:

"Hit's funny, ain't hit?" he snarled. "I've allus been funny t' you—ye ain't never done nothin' but laugh at me. But I done made up my mind a long time ago that I'd have ye some day—an' now—whether ye want t' go with me er not—" he sprang forward and caught her in his arms.

The girl screamed.

A moment later the Lizard was caught by a heavy hand and whirled twenty feet away. As he recovered his balance and snatched at the gun on his hip, Sonora Jack said sharply:

"Drop it!"

The Lizard, with his eyes fixed on the outlaw's steady weapon, raised his empty hands.

When Sonora Jack, with the coolness of his long experience, had disarmed his companion, he turned to the girl.

"I'm sorry for this, Señorita. I have said that with me you would be all right. I don't want you should be scared like this. Tell me, please, what did this hombre say?"

"It is nothing," stammered the girl.

"You don't cry loud like that for nothin'," returned the outlaw. "You don't get scared so for nothin'."

For some time the girl, by refusing to answer or by giving evasive answers to his questions, tried to keep from telling him what the Lizard had proposed. But Sonora Jack, with persistent and cunning questions, with adroit suggestions and bold assertions, drew from her, little by little, the truth.

Then the outlaw faced the cringing Lizard.

"So you think you play a game with Sonora Jack, heh? Don't I tell you how the Señorita is worth so much gold to me that she must be guarded with great care? What am I goin' to do now? You're traitor to me. I no can trust you this much while I'm gone such a little way to watch the trail. 'Fore we get to the border there's goin' to be plenty chances for you to betray me. I ain't goin' to be safe with you, even in Mexico. Come—the Señorita must not again be scared. Come! You an' me we take a little walk over there behind that hill."

Grasping the Lizard's arm, he forced the frightened creature to accompany him.

The terrified girl, watching, saw them disappear over the low ridge.

Trembling, she listened.

There was no sound.

Presently she saw the outlaw coming back over the hill.

Sonora Jack was alone.

Leisurely he approached, and bowing low, said gently:

"I'm sorry, Señorita, you got so scared. It ain't goin' to be so no more."

All night they rode and in the gray light of the early morning came to that small adobe ranch house near the Mexican border.

Save for a half-starved dog that slunk from sight behind the house as they approached, there seemed to be no life about the place. But when Sonora Jack, riding to within a few feet of the door, shouted, "Buenos dias, madre," the door opened and an old Mexican appeared. He greeted the outlaw with a cordial welcome and came forward to take the horses. At the same moment an ancient crone hobbled from the house.

"Hijo mio! Gracias a Dios que volvisle sin novedad," she cried. "My son! Thanks to God you have returned without mishap."

"Si, madre, sin novedad—Yes, mother, without mishap."

"You found the Mine with the Door of Iron?"

"No, Mother, but I found something else that will bring much gold to me."

He turned toward Marta and bade the girl dismount.

To the old man he said:

"We must eat and go on over the line quickly. Feed and water the animals but do not remove the saddles."

Then leading Marta into the house, he took her to a little room and told her to lie down and rest until their breakfast was ready, and left her.

When she was alone, the girl looked about with wondering interest. She had felt, even as they were approaching the house, that there was something strangely familiar about the place. She seemed to have been there before or else to have seen it all in some dream. That corral—the well—the water trough—the adobe building—the hard-beaten yard—the pile of mesquite wood—the heap of old tin cans and rubbish. Surely, she had seen it all before. The interior of the house, too, was familiar in every detail. The bed upon which she was lying—the old rawhide bottom chairs—the cracked mirror on the wall and that print of the Holy Family. How strange it all was! She was certain that once before she had been shut in that room, and, lying on that bed, had heard those voices talking in Mexican on the other side of that door.

In her wanderings with the old prospectors, Marta had picked up enough of the Mexican language to understand a little of the conversation. She learned

that the old woman was Sonora Jack's mother. As she listened now, she gathered that they were discussing her. She caught the words prospectors, Cañada del Oro, and several times she heard, little girl, while the old woman and the man who had come in after caring for the animals exclaimed with astonishment. In a flash, the meaning of it all came to her. She was the little girl. This was the place from which the Pardners had taken her.

But try as she might, she could not bring back that childhood experience with any degree of clearness. It was a hazy fragment—a memory. She could not recall how she was first brought to that place, nor what her relationship to those people had been. If only Hugh and Natachee would come. If only they could be here now. Perhaps—perhaps, they could force these people to tell what they knew about her.

At breakfast, the old woman and the man treated Marta with great deference. Again and again, they assured her in Mexican and broken English that she must not be frightened, that she would come to no harm if she obeyed Sonora Jack. When, with Sonora Jack, she rode away to the south, they watched until she passed from sight.

They had ridden two or three hours when the outlaw said:

"Señorita, we goin' come now to the end of our ride, for a little time. This is Mexico. The line is ten mile back. Over them hills ahead is a rancho. We goin' stop there. It is not so good place as I

like for you, but it is best I can do for now. Many men are goin' to be there—vaqueros—all kinds—bad hombres. All the time they come an' go. You no want to be scared, 'cause me—I'm goin' take good care of you. It is best if we make like you was my wife."

When the girl cried out with fear and he saw the horror in her eyes he hastened to explain:

"Señorita, you mistake—it is only that we make believe you are my wife. You sabe? If I take you to that place as Señorita Hillgrove, you goin' to be in much danger. I can fight them, yes—they know that I can fight, but—" he shrugged his shoulders, then: "Señora Richard would be safe, sure. Nobody is goin' make insult to the wife of Sonora Jack. They know for that Sonora Jack would sure kill."

When Marta would not, or more literally *could* not, agree, the outlaw impatiently spurred his horse forward.

"All right, Señorita, we goin' to see. I'm goin' to tell that you are my wife. I promise it is only a make-believe. If you goin' to tell it is not so—that you are not Señora Richards—then I can't help what comes next."

In a few minutes they were at the ranch. The house was a long, flat-topped, adobe building with several rooms opening on to a long ramada. In reality, the ranch was a general meeting place, or station, for cattle rustlers, smugglers and their kind from both sides of the border.

There were eight or ten men gathered in a group in front of the house as the outlaw and his prisoner

arrived. All of them knew Sonora Jack, and, with two or three exceptions, greeted him cordially. When the outlaw told them that his wife was ill from the long ride and must at once retire, Marta made no protest. Frightened as she was at the villainous company, worn with the nervous strain and the physical hardship of her journey, the poor girl's appearance made Sonora Jack's statement that she was ill more plausible.

A room at the end of the building was soon made ready by a mozo who appeared in answer to a call from one of the men. The pack mule was relieved of his burden and the things taken inside. The room was rather large, with two doors—one opening on to the ramada in front and one connecting the apartment with another. Two windows supplied plenty of fresh air, and the place was fairly well furnished as a bedroom. Evidently it was the best apartment that the establishment afforded.

When the mozo was gone and the door was shut, Sonora Jack whispered:

"You done all right, Señorita. Now you goin' be safe for sure. Everything goin' be fine. You make like you too sick to get out of bed. Me, I bring what you want to eat, myself." He smiled. "I goin' tell them hombres a pretty story 'bout my poor Señora who is so sick. Then I'm goin' play cards with them. All night we play an' you will not be scared. *Adios*, Señorita, don't you be scared, rest an' sleep."

Marta threw herself on the bed and, in spite of

her situation, fell into a deep sleep. When Sonora Jack brought her dinner, she awoke and, realizing that she must keep her strength for what might come, forced herself to eat. Then once more she slept.

When she was again awakened, it was dark. She could not guess the time. A strip of light shone under the door from that next room and she could hear the men who were drinking and gambling.

At times, their voices were raised in angry dispute or in boisterous laughter; again, there was only the slap-slap of cards as they were thrown on the table with the accompanying thud-thud of heavy hands, the click of bottle necks against glasses, the scuffling sound of a boot heel, the jingle of a spur, or the scrape of a chair on the rough floor. Then a drunken yell of exultation would ring out, accompanied by a heavy grumbling undertone.

The girl, trembling with fear, listened and waited. Would Sonora Jack keep his promise? Was the incentive, which led him to protect her from even himself, strong enough to endure when he had become inflamed by drink?

Slowly the terrible hours passed. It must be nearly midnight. The voices of the men in the next room were becoming louder, more quarrelsome and reckless. Suddenly the frightened girl felt, rather than heard, that front door opening. In the dim light she saw it swing slowly, inch by inch.

She held her breath. She wanted to scream but she dared not. The door swung a little farther and

she could see the stars through the opening. Then a dark form slipped into the room as soundless as a shadow. Noiselessly the door was closed.

Cold with horror, unable to move a muscle, the girl cowered on the bed.

The shadowy form moved toward her. It stopped —then came a low whisper.

"Miss Hillgrove, do not be frightened, be very still. I, Natachee, have come for you."

CHAPTER XXIX

THE RESCUE

And Marta gave a low cry of delight when, far away to the northeast, they saw the blue heights of the Santa Catalinas.

FOR a moment Marta could not speak. Then in spite of herself she gave a low cry of joy which brought another whispered warning from the Indian.

Moving closer, he said:

"Hugh Edwards is waiting with the horses. We have the pinto and your saddle but I fear you must leave everything else. Not all the men are in there gambling and drinking. There are three in front of the house at the farther end of the ramada. They are sitting with their backs toward your door so I was able to get in. I dared not wait longer because, from their talk, they are expecting some one to come any minute. Then the party in the next room will break up and it will be too late for us to move. We must hurry."

"I am ready," whispered the girl.

"You will be brave and do exactly what I say?"

"Yes."

"Good!—Come."

There was a burst of angry voices in the next room. The Indian waited until he was satisfied that the

gamblers were continuing their play, then, leading Marta to the window in the end of the building toward the west, he slipped through, and from the outside helped the girl to follow.

At that moment they heard the sound of feet on the hard earth floor of the ramada. Some one was coming toward that end of the house. With his lips to the girl's ear, Natachee bade her lie down. She obeyed instantly, and the Indian, knife in hand, crept to the corner of the building, toward which the sound was approaching, where he stood, flattened against the wall.

The man who was coming along the front of the house walked leisurely to the end of the ramada and stood almost within reach of the Indian's hand, looking out toward the west and toward the corrals. Natachee was as motionless as the wall against which he stood. Had the fellow gone a step farther or turned his head to look past the corner of the building, he would have died that same instant. Presently he turned and started back toward his companions, calling to them in Mexican as he did so:

"It is strange that they are so late. They should have been here an hour ago."

In a flash Natachee was again at Marta's side. Lifting her to her feet, he whispered:

"Follow me and do as I do."

A hundred feet away, a hollow in the uneven ground made a deeper shadow. Lying prone, the Indian crawled to the little depression. The girl followed close behind. For a moment they lay side

by side in the hollow, then the Indian rose and stooping low ran for the dark mass of a mesquite tree some fifty yards farther on.

Again Marta imitated his movements.

"Good!" whispered the Indian as she crouched, breathless, beside him. "But from here on there are too many dry sticks and things for you to stumble over and we must go swiftly."

Before she realized his purpose, he had caught her up in his arms, and keeping the tree between them and the house, was running swift and silent as a wolf through the brush. When they were at a safe distance, the Indian circled to the right and so gained the shelter of the corral fence, with the corral which was north of the house between them and the ramada where the three men were still sitting. Putting the girl down, he whispered:

"If you should make any noise now, they will think it is the horses, but be careful."

Following the back fence of the corral, they were soon some distance east of the house. Then, still keeping the fences between them and the three men on the ramada, Natachee led the way toward a mesquite thicket in a sandy wash between two low ridges where Hugh was waiting with the horses.

There was no time for greetings. Scarcely had they gained their saddles when a yell came from the house, and in the light that streamed from the open door of the room where the gamblers had been carousing, they could see the dark forms of the

men gather in answer to the alarm. Clearly they heard the voice of Sonora Jack crying:

"Se fue la muchacha! Los caballos! A seguir la!—The girl is gone! The horses! To follow her!"

When the Indian made no move to go, but sat calmly watching the lights and listening to the voices of the outlaws as they called to one another while saddling their horses, Edwards said impatiently:

"Come, Natachee, we are losing valuable time here. If we go now, we will have a good start ahead of them."

"No," returned the Indian. "That is exactly what they expect us to do and their horses are much faster and fresher than ours. They think that we are making for the United States by the most direct route, which is there due north between those two mountain ranges—the Santa Rosas to the left and the Nariz to the east. They will not waste time trying to find our trail in the darkness but will try to outride us to the line and, by scattering, to cover the country so as to prevent us from crossing. Be patient and you will see."

Very soon the Indian's judgment was proved sound. The outlaws dashed away as fast as their horses could run toward that gap in the mountains through which Sonora Jack had brought Marta the day before. When the last rider was gone and the rolling thunder of the horses' feet had died away in the darkness, Natachee spoke again.

"Good; now we will go. When the day comes, we

must be on the northern side of the Nariz Mountains and a little to the east of where Edwards and I struck the hills yesterday. As we start behind the outlaws, we need not fear pursuit, at least until daybreak."

For two or three miles the Indian followed the northern course taken by the outlaws, then, turning aside from the broad, well-traveled trail, he led the way at a leisurely but steady pace to the northeast. Another hour and they were well into the Nariz hills. By daylight they were on the northern side of the range—in the United States.

Leaving their horses, they climbed to a point from which they could look out over the wide plains of the Papago Reservation, with its scattered groups of hills and small mountain ranges bounded by the mighty bulwark of the Baboquivaris and the Coyotes on the east and by the Santa Rosa and Gunsight Mountains on the west. And Marta gave a low cry of delight when, far away to the northeast, they saw the blue heights of the Santa Catalinas lifting boldly into the morning sky.

For some time the Indian scanned the country at the foot of the hills where they stood. There was not a living creature moving within range of his vision. With a smile, Natachee turned to his companions and pointing to the west, said:

"Sonora Jack and his friends are very busy looking for us over there between these hills and the Santa Rosas yonder."

"Thanks to you, Natachee," the girl answered with deep feeling.

As if he had not heard, the Indian pointed more to the north and continued:

"That smoke which you see over there is from a little ranch—Mexican, I think—toward which we trailed you and Sonora Jack yesterday. Did you stop there?"

Marta told them briefly of her experience—of the old Mexican woman who was evidently Sonora Jack's mother, and of her conviction that it was from those people that the old prospectors had taken her when she was a little girl.

Hugh Edwards heard her story with many exclamations, comments and questions. The Indian, who continued to scan the country before them with ceaseless vigilance, listened without a word.

When Marta had finished her story, Natachee said:

"It is time we were moving, friends. Sonora Jack will be on our trail. When he has made sure that we did not take the course he thought we would take, he will ride east along the Mexico side of this range until he picks up our trail; for he will know that we would not go into the Santa Rosa Mountains. I think he will bring with him only one or two men, because he will not wish to share the profit of his venture with so many when one or two are all that he needs, now that it is no longer a question of heading us off before we cross the border. There would be a greater risk, too, with a large company—in the United States. He will know that there are

only three of us and will plan to follow and pick us off at a safe distance when the opportunity offers or attack us to-night. When he has again taken his prisoner, he can easily rid himself of one or two helpers as he disposed of the Lizard."

A quarter of a mile from where they had left their horses, the low ridge, beyond which lay the open country, was broken by a narrow, sandy wash. One side of this natural gateway of these hills is an irregular cliff some twenty feet in height. The Indian, leading the way straight to this opening, passed close under the cliff and, leaving the hills behind, set their course straight toward the distant Santa Catalinas.

They had ridden but a short way when the Indian again halted. Pointing to a peak in the northern end of the Baboquivaris, he said to Hugh:

"That is Kits Peak. If you ride toward it, you will come to Indian Oasis. There is a store there where you can water and feed your horses and purchase something to eat for yourselves. I am going back to wait for Sonora Jack. I will overtake you later."

He was turning his horse to ride away, when Edwards cried:

"Wait a minute. Do you mean that you are going back to meet those outlaws?"

"Sonora Jack must be stopped," returned the Indian.

"All right," agreed Hugh, "but Sonora Jack is not alone. Do you think I am going to ride on and leave you to face those fellows single-handed?"

"You faced three of them single-handed for me. I, Natachee, do not forget."

"But that was different," argued Edwards. "There were several things in my favor. No—no, Natachee, it won't do. When you meet those fellows who are following our trail, I must be there to do my little bit with you."

"But Miss Hillgrove," said the Indian.

Marta spoke quickly. "Hugh is right, Natachee."

The Indian yielded.

"Come, then, we must not delay longer, or it will be too late."

Swinging in a wide circle to the right, Natachee led the way swiftly back to a point at the foot of the ridge, a short distance east of that rocky gateway. They dismounted at a spot that was well hidden and the Indian, directing Marta to stay with the horses and telling Edwards to follow, ran quickly along the ridge to the top of the cliff directly above the tracks they had made when first leaving the hills.

When he had assured himself that there was no one in sight following their trail, the Indian stood before his companion and Hugh knew that it was not the Natachee of the schools that was about to speak. Drawing himself up proudly, the red man said:

"Hugh Edwards, listen—seven days ago this stealer of women, Sonora Jack, and his companions, crawled like three snakes into Natachee's hut. Hiding, they struck, when Natachee alone crossed the threshold of his home. In the night, they bound

the Indian to a rock, and but for you would have put live coals from their fire on his naked breast. One of the three who did that thing is dying in the Cañon of Gold—is even now, perhaps, dead, but I, Natachee, did not strike him. The body of another is over there in the Vaca Hills. He did not die by the hand of the Indian he had trapped. Sonora Jack alone is left. He is left for me. Do you understand?"

The white man, remembering the Indian's face and manner when he had found the Lizard's body, understood. Slowly—reluctantly, he said:

"This is your affair, Natachee, have it your own way."

They had not waited long when Natachee saw Sonora Jack and a Mexican riding down through the hills. The Indian, fitting an arrow to his bow, said to his companion:

"When I give the word, stand up and cover Sonora Jack with your rifle."

With their eyes on the tracks they were following, the outlaws rode swiftly toward the rocks where Natachee and Edwards were waiting. Sonora Jack was a little in advance. They were just past the cliff when the Mexican, with a cry, tumbled from his saddle. Sonora Jack pulled his horse up sharply and whirled about to see what had happened. At the moment he caught sight of the arrow in the body of his fallen companion, Natachee's voice rang out from the rock above with the familiar command: "Put up your hands."

And looking up, the outlaw saw the Indian with another arrow drawn to its head, and the white man with his menacing rifle.

While Edwards covered the trapped outlaw, the Indian relieved their captive of his guns and ordered him to dismount. Then Natachee motioned for Edwards to lower his rifle and stood face to face with Sonora Jack. From his position on the rocks, Hugh Edwards looked down upon them with intense interest.

At last the red man spoke.

"The snake that crawled into Natachee's hut to strike when the Indian was not looking is caught. One of his brother snakes he left to die in the home he robbed. Another, he killed with his own hand. It is not well that even one of the three snakes that hid in Natachee's hut should remain alive. When Sonora Jack, with the help of his two brother snakes, had bound Natachee to a rock, Sonora Jack was very brave. He was so brave that he dared even to strike the helpless Indian. Now, he shall strike the Indian again—if he can.

"When the snake, Sonora Jack, would have put his coals of fire on the naked breast of the Indian, he required the help of two others. If I, Natachee, could not alone kill a snake, I would die of shame. The one who frightened Sonora Jack and his brave friends so that they ran like rabbits into the brush is here. But Natachee is not bound to a rock now. Sonora Jack need not fear the one from whom he and his brothers ran in such haste. Hugh Edwards

will not point his rifle toward the snake that I, Natachee, will kill.

"Sonora Jack boasted that with live coals of fire he would burn the heart out of Natachee's breast. There is no fire here, but here is a knife. Sonora Jack also has a knife. Let the snake, who was so brave with his two brother snakes when they hid in Natachee's hut and bound the Indian to a rock, keep his heart from the knife of the Indian now—if he can."

The two men were by no means unevenly matched in stature or in strength. Both were men whose muscles had been hardened by their active lives in the desert and the mountains. Both were skilled in the use of the knife as a weapon. Sonora Jack fought with the desperate fury of a cornered animal. The Indian, cool and calculating, seemed in no haste to finish that which in his savage pride he had set himself to accomplish. So swiftly did the duelists change positions, so closely were they locked together as they wheeled and twisted in their struggles, that the white man, who was trembling with tense excitement, could not have used his rifle if he would. At his repeated failures to touch the Indian with his knife, the outlaw lost, more and more, his self-control, until he was fighting with reckless and ungoverned madness. Natachee, wary and collected, smiled grimly as he saw the fear in the straining face of his enemy.

Then twice, in quick succession, the point of the Indian's knife reached the outlaw's breast but with

no effect. Edwards gasped in dismay as he saw the baffled look which came into Natachee's face. Again the Indian, with all the strength of his arm, drove his weapon at the outlaw's heart and again Sonora Jack was unharmed. Suddenly the Indian changed his method of attack. To Edwards, the duel seemed to become a wrestling match. For a moment they struggled, locked in each other's arms, their limbs entwined, writhing and straining. Then they fell, and to Edwards' horror, the Indian was under the outlaw. But the next instant, while Sonora Jack was struggling to free his knife arm for a death blow, the Indian, hugging his antagonist close, forced his weapon between Sonora Jack's shoulders.

The muscles of the outlaw relaxed—his body became limp. Natachee rolled to one side and leaped to his feet. As if he had forgotten the solitary witness of the combat, the Indian calmly recovered his knife and stood looking down at the man who was already dead.

Sick with horror of the thing he had been forced to witness, Hugh Edwards called to the Indian:

"Come, Natachee, for God's sake let's get away from here."

"The snake that crawled into Natachee's hut is dead," returned the Indian. "The stealer of women will not again steal the woman Hugh Edwards loves."

Hugh was already starting back to the place where they had left Marta. When he noticed that the Indian was not following, he paused to call again:

"Aren't you coming?"

"Go on," returned Natachee, "I will join you in a moment."

And Hugh Edwards, from where he now stood, could not see that Natachee was examining the body of the outlaw to learn why the point of his knife had three times been kept from Sonora Jack's breast.

When Hugh reached Marta, the Indian was just behind him. To the girl, Natachee said simply:

"You can ride home in peace now. There is no one to follow our trail. Sonora Jack will never come for you again."

And Marta asked no questions.

On the homeward journey, Natachee did not follow the course they had come, but took a more direct route. Near Indian Oasis they stopped, while Natachee went to the store to purchase food. When they camped for the night, Marta would let them rest only an hour or two, insisting that she must push on.

In the excitement and dangers of that first night, there had been no opportunity for Hugh Edwards to speak to Marta of his love. And now, as the hours of their long, trying journey passed, he still did not speak. There really was no need for him to speak—they both knew so well. The girl was so distressed by her anxiety for Thad and by her grief over Bob's death and so worn by her terrible experience, that Hugh could not bring himself to talk of the plans that meant so much to him.

When they were safely back in the Cañon of Gold and Marta was rested—when she had found comfort and strength in Mother Burton's arms, then he would tell her his love and ask her to go with him to a place of freedom and happiness.

CHAPTER XXX

PARDNERS STILL

Every day he spent the greater part of his time under the mesquite trees with Bob, and in the night, they would hear him going out "to see," as he said, "if his pardner was all right."

IN the Cañada del Oro, Doctor Burton and his mother watched beside the old prospector and the wounded Mexican.

The man who had been so heartlessly abandoned by his outlaw leader did not speak; but his eyes, like the eyes of a wounded animal, followed every movement of Saint Jimmy and Mother Burton. But as the days and nights of suffering passed, and he received nothing but the gentlest and most attentive care from the two good Samaritans into whose hands he had fallen, the expression of suspicion and fear which had at first marked his every glance gave way to a look of wondering and pathetic gratitude.

It was late in the afternoon of that first day following the tragedy, when Thad regained consciousness. Saint Jimmy, who was at the bedside when the sturdy old prospector looked up at him with a smile of recognition, said cheerfully:

"Good morning, neighbor. How are you? Had a good sleep?"

There was the suggestion of a twinkle in those faded blue eyes as Thad returned:

"There ain't no need for you to pretend none with me, Doc. I come to, quite a spell back. Got a peek at you, though, first thing when you weren't lookin' an' I jest naterally shut my eyes again quick. I been layin' here, figgerin' things out. Got 'em about figgered, I reckon." His leathery, wrinkled, old face twisted in a grimace of pain and his gray lips quivered as he added: "They got my gal, didn't they?"

Saint Jimmy returned gravely:

"You must be careful not to excite yourself, Thad. You have had a dangerous injury."

"Holy Cats! You don't need to think this is the first time I ever been knocked out. My old head is tougher than you know. You don't need to worry about me gettin' rattled neither. I tell you I know what happened up to the time that half Mex devil hit me with his gun. I know they must a-got her or she would a-been settin' right here, certain sure—tell me."

"Yes, they took her away, but Hugh Edwards and Natachee are on their trail."

"What time did the boys start after them?"

"About noon."

"Good enough. They won't throw the Injun off, an' him an' Hugh will be able to handle them if they ain't too many."

"There are only two with Marta—Sonora Jack and the Lizard."

"The Lizard, you say? Is he in on this deal too?"

"Yes."

"Huh, I always knowed he'd do some real meanness if he ever worked up nerve enough. That made three of them, then?"

"Yes."

"I got one of them, didn't I?"

"Yes, he is lying in the other room."

"Pretty sick, is he?"

"He is going to die, Thad."

"Uh–huh, that's what I expected him to do when I took a shot at him."

The old prospector looked at Doctor Burton appealingly, as if there was another question which he longed, yet dreaded to ask.

Saint Jimmy evaded the unspoken question by asking:

"Have you guessed who that fellow, John Holt, really is, Thad?"

"He certain sure ain't no decent prospector or he wouldn't be tryin' to carry away my gal like he's doin'—that's all I know."

"He is Sonora Jack the outlaw. Natachee found it out."

"Holy Cats! An' I wasted a shot on a measly Mex when I might jest as well a-picked the king himself first. But what do you figger he wants to carry off my gal that-a-way for?"

"I wish we knew," said Saint Jimmy.

"Wal, there ain't no good tryin' to guess. We'll

know what we know when Natachee and Hugh comes back with her— But, say, Doc——"

The old prospector hesitated, and his gaze roamed about the room.

Saint Jimmy swallowed a lump in his throat.

"What, Thad?"

"Where—why—" the gnarled fingers plucked at the bedding nervously, and the faded blue eyes at last met the eyes of the younger man with such pathetic fear that Saint Jimmy's eyes filled.

"Why ain't my Pardner Bob here? Where is he? He didn't go with the Injun an' the boy?"

"No, Thad, Bob did not go with Hugh and Natachee."

The old prospector put out his trembling hand as if to cling to Saint Jimmy, and Doctor Burton caught it in both his own.

"They—they didn't get my pardner—Bob ain't cashed in?"

Saint Jimmy bowed his head.

Then his mother came to the door and the Doctor willingly made an excuse to leave his patient for a little. When he returned an hour later and Mother Burton had yielded her place to him and left the room, old Thad smiled up at him.

"That mother of yourn is a plumb wonder, sir. I always suspicioned it on account of what she's done for Marta, but I know now that I hadn't even begun to appreciate it. I reckon I'll be gettin' up now."

"And I reckon you won't," retorted the Doctor, putting out a firm hand and pushing him back on

the pillow. "You'll stay right where you are until to-morrow morning. You have already talked too much. Here, let me fix the bandage. There, that will do. Now take this and turn your face to the wall—and keep quiet."

The old prospector obeyed.

But the next morning he was out of the house before either Saint Jimmy or his mother had left their beds. When Mrs. Burton went to call him for breakfast, she found him beside the grave under the mesquite trees.

"You see, ma'am," he explained with childish confusion, "I got to imaginin' 'long in the night that my Pardner Bob must be feelin' all-fired lonesome an' left-out like, with me sleepin' in the house an' him out here all alone. Bob an' me ain't never been very far apart, you see, for a good many years now, an' so I felt like he'd kind of want me 'round somewheres. It's funny, ain't it, how an old desert rat like me could get fussed up that-a-way! I think mebby that Bob would feel some better too if only our gal was here. I'm plumb sure I would. But I know she'll be back all right. That Injun can hang to a trail like the smell follers a skunk, an' the boy will be here too, with both feet, when it comes to gettin' her away from them again. That half Mex an' the Lizard won't stand a show agin Natachee an' our Hugh. I wish they'd hurry back, though.

"Yes, ma'am, I'm comin'.

"So long, Pardner, I got to get my breakfast. I'll be back again directly."

Every day he spent the greater part of his time under the mesquite trees with Bob, and in the night they would hear him going out "to see," as he said, "if his pardner was all right."

It was there that Marta found him the morning of her return with Hugh and Natachee.

Later, when Mother Burton had put the tired girl to bed, old Thad roamed contentedly about the place, petting Nugget and going often to the door of Marta's room to listen with a smile for any sound that would tell him the girl was awake. And that night he did not leave the house.

"You see, ma'am," he explained to Mother Burton in the morning, "Bob he's all right now that our gal is safe home again and there ain't nobody ever goin' to steal her no more. It's a good thing the Lizard is gone an' that the Injun done for that Sonora Jack, 'cause if they hadn't a-got what was comin' to 'em, I'd be obliged to take a try for them myself, old as I be. I couldn't never a-looked Bob in the face again nohow, if I'd a-let them hombres get away with such a job as that. But it's all right now—it's sure all right."

During the forenoon of the day following Marta's return, the Mexican at last spoke to Doctor Burton, who was dressing his patient's wound. As the man spoke in his native tongue, Saint Jimmy could not understand. Going to the door, he called Natachee. When the Mexican had repeated what he had said, the Indian interpreted his words for Saint Jimmy.

"He says he thinks he is going to die and wants to know if it is so."

"Shall I tell him the truth, Natachee?"

"Why not?" returned the Indian coldly. "He may have something that he wishes to say. Perhaps it is something the friends of Miss Hillgrove should know."

"Tell him, then, that there is no hope for his life. Death is certain. It may come any time now."

When Natachee had repeated the Doctor's words in the Mexican tongue and the dying man had replied, the Indian said:

"There is something that he wants to tell. He says that you and your mother have been so kind that he will not die without speaking of the girl you both love so much. I think you should call the others. It may be in the nature of a confession and it would be well to have them."

He spoke again to the Mexican and the man answered:

"Si, habla le a la muchacha y sus amigos."

Natachee interpreted:

"Yes, call the girl and her friends."

A few minutes later Mother Burton, Thad, Hugh Edwards and Marta were with Saint Jimmy and the Indian in the presence of the dying Mexican.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE MEXICAN'S CONFESSION

It was well that no one in the room, save Natachee and the Mexican, could at that moment see Saint Jimmy's face.

SLOWLY the eyes of the Mexican turned from face to face of the silent group. But it was upon Saint Jimmy's face that his gaze finally rested, and it was to Saint Jimmy that he addressed himself. The Indian, as coldly impersonal and impassive as a mechanical instrument, translated:

"He says that you, Doctor Burton, are a man who lives very close to God. When you are near him, he can feel God."

"God is never far from any man," returned Saint Jimmy.

Natachee translated the Doctor's words, and the Mexican replied in his mother tongue, which the Indian rendered in English.

"He says, yes, sir, that is true, but some men keep their backs toward God and refuse to see or listen to Him. He says he is one who has lived with his face away from God."

"Tell him, then, to turn around."

Again the Indian translated Saint Jimmy's words and received the Mexican's answer.

"He says he sees God when he looks at you—that if you will remain with him when he dies he can go with his face toward God."

"I will not leave him," returned Saint Jimmy. "Tell him not to fear."

When he received this message from the Indian, the man smiled and made the sign of the cross. Then he spoke again and Natachee translated:

"He says to thank you, and that now he will tell you all he knows about the girl you love."

It was well that no one in the room, save Natachee and the Mexican, could at that moment see Saint Jimmy's face.

"Tell him that we are listening."

With frequent pauses to gather strength or to shape the things he would say, the Mexican told his story. In those intervals Natachee's deep voice, without a trace of feeling, made the message clear to the little company.

"His name is Chico Alvarez. He was a member of Sonora Jack's band of outlaws in the years when they were active here in this part of Arizona.

"About twenty years ago they held up a man and woman who were driving in a covered wagon on the road from Tucson to Yuma and California. The man and woman were killed. There was a little girl hiding in the bottom of the wagon. They did not know the baby was there when they shot the man and woman.

"When Sonora Jack was searching the outfit for money and valuables, he found papers and letters

that told him about the little girl. She was not the child of the people who were killed. They had stolen her, when she was a little baby, from her real parents who lived in the east.

"Sonora Jack saved all the papers and letters that told about the child, but burned everything else in the outfit so that no one would know there had been a child with the man and woman. He took the baby with him. He said her parents were very rich and would pay much money to have their little girl again.

"The officers were close after the outlaws who were escaping to their place across the border, and Sonora Jack left the little girl with his mother, who was Mexican and lived with her man, not Jack's father, on a little ranch near the border. When Sonora Jack went back to his mother for the child, after the sheriff and his men had given up trying to catch him that time, he found that two prospectors had taken the little girl away.

"Sonora Jack dared not come again into the United States because of the reward that was offered for him, so he could not follow the prospectors, and the little girl was lost to him. Sonora Jack went south in Mexico and stayed there where he was safe.

"Last year a man showed him an old Spanish map of the Cañada del Oro and the Mine with the Iron Door. Sonora Jack and this man, Chico, came to find the mine. They did not find the mine but they found again the little girl, whose people would pay so much money to have her back. Sonora Jack

planned to steal the girl. He said they would take her into Mexico and keep her until her people paid much money. If it should be that her people were dead, then he and Chico would make from her enough money in another way to pay them for their trouble. That is all."

The Mexican closed his eyes wearily.

Saint Jimmy spoke quickly:

"Ask him what became of the things that told about the little girl's parents, and how she was stolen from them."

The Indian spoke to the man and received his reply.

"He says, 'I do not know. Sonora Jack he always keep those things for himself.'"

Hugh Edwards cried hoarsely:

"But the name, Natachee, ask him the name."

The dying Mexican opened his eyes as the Indian, bending over him, repeated the question. He answered:

"Eso nunca me dijo Sonora Jack," and with a look toward Saint Jimmy, sank into unconsciousness.

Natachee faced toward that little company of agitated listeners.

"He says, 'Sonora Jack never did tell me that.'"

Mother Burton led Marta from the room. Old Thad, muttering to himself, followed.

Doctor Burton turned from the bedside, saying quietly:

"It is all over. He is gone."

Natachee spoke:

"You, Doctor Burton—and you, Hugh Edwards, wait here for me. The others will not come again into this room for a little while. Wait, I will come back in a moment."

The Indian left the room.

Hugh Edwards and Saint Jimmy looked at each other in wondering silence.

When Natachee returned, he held in his hand a flat package, some six inches wide by eight inches long and about an inch in thickness. The envelope was of leather, laced securely, and there were straps attached. The straps had been cut.

The Indian addressed Hugh:

"As I fought with Sonora Jack, did you see that when I struck his breast my knife drew no blood?"

"Yes," returned Edwards, "I saw it and wondered about it at the time. But what happened immediately after made me forget. Now that you mention it, I remember distinctly."

"Good! When you had gone back to Miss Hillgrove, I looked to see why my knife had refused to touch the snake's heart until I found the way between his shoulders. This package was fastened to Sonora Jack's breast under his shirt. This strap was over his shoulder to support it. This other strap was around his chest to hold the packet in place. Look, there are the marks of my knife. Three times I struck—there and there and there."

The two white men exclaimed with amazement at the Indian's statement.

"I think," said Natachee slowly, "that you would do well to see what this thing is, that the stealer of little girls hid so carefully under his clothing and fastened so securely to his body."

Hugh Edwards drew back with an appealing look at Saint Jimmy, who took the packet from the Indian.

"Must this thing be opened?" said Edwards.

"Yes, Hugh, I think so," returned the Doctor gently. "Anything else would hardly be fair to Marta, would it?"

"No, I suppose not," answered Edwards with a groan. "All right, go ahead. You can tell me when you have finished."

He turned away and went to the window where he sat with his back toward Saint Jimmy, who seated himself at the table. Natachee stood near the door with his arms folded, as motionless as a statue.

Undoing the lacing of the leather envelope, Saint Jimmy found a number of newspaper clippings, so cut as to preserve the name and date line of the paper—several letters—and a diary, with various entries under different dates, rather poorly written but legible.

Swiftly he scanned the printed articles. The diary and the letters he read with more care.

Hugh Edwards was like a man condemned already in his own mind, awaiting the formality of the verdict.

When Marta's birth and the character of her parents had been under a cloud, the man who was

branded before the world a criminal had felt that their love was right and that there was no obstacle to their marriage. He had reasoned, indeed, that their happiness would in a measure lighten the shadow that lay over the girl's life, and in a degree would atone for the injustice under which he himself had suffered. The unjust shame and humiliation that the girl had felt so keenly—the dishonor and shame that injustice had brought upon him, had been to them a common bond; while the knowledge of what each had innocently suffered and the sympathy of each for the other had deepened and strengthened their love.

But as he listened to the dying Mexican's story, he saw the barrier that was being raised to his happiness with the girl he loved. Marta's birth and parentage were not, after all, what the old prospectors, Saint Jimmy, and Marta herself had believed. What, then, was left to justify him in asking her to become the wife of a convict? If, indeed, her birth and name were without a shadow, how could he ask her to accept his name—dishonored as it was? And if it should be shown that her people were living—if they were people of importance and honor, how then could the convict who loved her ask her to share his life of dishonor?

When the Mexican had been unable to give the name, hope had again risen in Edwards' heart. But when Natachee brought the packet which Sonora Jack had treasured with such care, Hugh Edwards knew that it was only a matter of minutes

until the identity of the woman he loved would be established, which meant that now he could never ask her to be his wife.

Saint Jimmy finished reading the papers and carefully placed them again in the leather envelope. To the watching Indian, he seemed undecided. He had the air of one not quite sure of his hand.

At last, looking up, he said slowly:

"You are right, Natachee, this envelope completes the Mexican's story and establishes the identity of the girl we have always known as Marta Hillgrove."

CHAPTER XXXII

REVELATION

Natachee remembered

HUGH EDWARDS rose to his feet.

"Well," he said desperately, "let's have it."

Saint Jimmy answered in an odd musing tone:

"Marta, or Martha, for that is her name, was born in a little city in southwestern Missouri—in the lead and zinc mining district. Her parents were both held in the highest esteem in the community where their families had lived for three generations.

"About the time Marta was born, her father, who was a real-estate speculator and trader on a rather small scale, purchased a tract of land from some people who could barely make a living on it. The land was hilly and stony and covered mostly with scrub oak, which made it almost worthless for farming and the man and his wife were glad to get the usual market price for such property.

"But shortly after, this same cheap farm land was developed as a very valuable mineral property—about the richest, in fact, in that district."

Hugh Edwards interrupted:

"Wait a minute—did you learn all this just now from the contents of that package?"

"No, Hugh, the fact is, I was born and grew up in that same Missouri town. It was the home of my people, and even after I went to St. Louis, I was in close touch with the old place. These papers here merely fill in some of the missing details of a story that I have known for years. I am trying to tell it to you so that you will understand everything clearly."

"Go on, please."

"When the property they had sold proved so valuable, the people who had been glad to receive the price they did for their supposedly worthless farm lands were very bitter. They considered themselves swindled and, being the sort they were, brooded over their fancied wrongs until they formed a plan of revenge. They stole the baby, Martha.

"The plan of the kidnapers, as it is shown here," Saint Jimmy touched the packet on the table, "was to hold the little girl until her father had made a fortune from the mineral lands he had purchased from them, and then to force him to pay a large part of that wealth back to them as a ransom for the child.

"The man and woman, with the baby, traveled west by wagon. They always camped. When supplies were needed, the man would go alone to purchase them. They rarely entered a town except to pass through, and then of course took every precaution to hide the child. Their plan to extort money from the father, led them to preserve carefully the evidence that would later prove the identity of the little girl. Their fears of arrest led them

to conceal their own identity as carefully. It was more than a year later when they reached Tucson. The rest of the story we have heard.

"I should add that Marta's mother died six months after the baby was stolen. George Clinton, after his wife's death, sold his mining interests and moved to California."

Hugh Edwards started forward. His face was ghastly. His lips trembled so that he could scarcely form the words. "George Clinton, did you say?"

"Yes."

"George Willard Clinton?"

"Yes, do you know of him?"

Hugh Edwards, fighting for self-control, became very still. Turning his back on the others, he walked to the window and stood looking out.

"Yes," he said at last, and his voice was steady now, "yes, I know him. He lives in Los Angeles. I had heard that he was at one time interested in mines in Missouri. But of course I knew nothing of this story that you have told. He is a very wealthy man."

"What a splendid thing for Marta," exclaimed Saint Jimmy.

Hugh Edwards left the window and went to stand beside the body of the Mexican.

"Yes, it will be very fine for her."

And suddenly, as he stood looking down at the dead man, Hugh Edwards laughed.

Saint Jimmy sprang to his feet. Such laughter was not good to hear.

"Hugh!"

The man whirled on him. "You win, Saint Jimmy—congratulations." He rushed madly from the room.

Saint Jimmy gazed at Natachee, speechless with amazement.

"What on earth did he mean by that!" he said at last.

"Is it possible you do not know?"

The other shook his head.

Natachee said slowly:

"When everybody believed that the woman Hugh Edwards loved was one who had no real right to even the name she bore, then he could ask her to become his wife. Now that the woman is the daughter of honor and wealth, how can the convict expect her to go with him? Hugh Edwards is not blind. He sees it is now more fitting that the woman he loves become the wife of his friend, Saint Jimmy, upon whose name there is no shadow."

But Natachee, with the cunning of his Indian nature, had not given Saint Jimmy the whole truth in his explanation of Hugh Edwards' manner.

Natachee remembered that the man who had promoted that investment company, and who had used his power, as the president of the institution, to rob the people of their savings, and who, to shield himself, had sent Donald Payne, an innocent man, to prison, was George Willard Clinton.

CHAPTER XXXIII

GOLD

He saw that the need of gold is a curse—that the craving for gold is a greater curse—that the possession of gold may be the greatest curse of all.

WHEN Hugh Edwards left Saint Jimmy and the Indian, he was beside himself with grief and rage. He had prepared himself, in a measure, to lose Marta. He had told himself that his love was strong enough to endure even that test, but to give her up because she proved to be the daughter of the man who, by making him a convict, had robbed him of the right to keep her, was more than he could endure.

As he rushed blindly from the house that had been to him a house of refuge, but was now become a house of torment, Marta called to him.

He did not stop. He must get away—away from them all. The old prospector, Saint Jimmy, Natachee, Marta, the dead Mexican—they had all conspired with God to sink him in a hell of conflicting love and hatred.

When he came to himself, he was at the cabin where he had made his home during those first months of his life in the Cañon of Gold. When he was seeking a place to hide, as a wild creature

wounded by the hunters seeks to hide from the dogs, he had found that little cabin. He had learned to feel safe there. But he did not feel safe there now. The empty place was crowded with memories that would drive him to some deed of madness.

It was there his dream of freedom and love had been born. It was there that the dear comradeship of the girl had led him to believe there might still be something to hope for, to work for and to live for. He could not stay there now. The place was no longer a place where he could hide from his enemies; it was a trap, a snare. He must go, and go quickly.

Without consciously willing his movements, indeed, without realizing where he was going, he climbed out of the cañon and hurried away up the mountain slopes and along the ridges in the direction of Natachee's hut. With no clearly defined trail to follow, it is doubtful if in his normal mental state he could have found the place. He certainly would not have made the attempt, particularly at that time of day. But some subconscious memory must have guided him, for at sundown he found himself in the familiar gulch where he had toiled all through the winter for the gold that meant for him the realization of his dreams of freedom and happiness with Marta. When night came, he was seated on that spot from which he had so often, in the agony of those lonely months of hiding, watched the tiny point of light in the gloom of the cañon below.

With his eyes fixed on that red spot, which he

knew was the window of Marta's room, Hugh Edwards brooded over the series of events that had ended in that hour of his dead hopes and broken dreams.

His thoughts went back even to those glad days when he was graduated from his university, and when, with a heart of honest courage and purpose, he had accepted a position of trust in the institution that seemed to afford such an opportunity for service. He recalled every proud step of his advancement from office to office, of increasing responsibility.

He lived again that appalling hour when he knew that he had been promoted only that he might be betrayed. Again he suffered the agony of his arrest —the trial, with his baffled attempts to prove his innocence—the hideous publicity—the hatred of the people—and again he heard the sentence that condemned him to years in prison, and to a life of dishonor and shame.

Once more he endured the horror of a convict's life—and the death of his mother.

Then came the terrible experiences of his escape—when he was hunted as a wild beast is hunted, with dogs and guns.

And then—the Cañon of Gold, with its promise of peace and safety—its blessed work and dreams and hopes—its miraculous gift of love.

One by one, the strange events of his life in the Cañon of Gold passed in review before him—the period when he lived in the cabin next door to the old prospectors and their partnership daughter—his

comradeship with Marta and the sure development of their love—the story of the girl's questionable parentage that had made it possible for him to think of her as his wife—then the visit of the sheriff—his enforced life of torment with the Indian, and his fruitless toil for the gold that held him with its promise of freedom and Marta.

Again he lived over the coming of the outlaw, with the sudden turn of fortune that made Natachee his ally, and gave him the gold from the Mine with the Iron Door.

And then, with the gold in his possession and all its promises almost within his grasp, the tragedy and disaster that had followed. Until now, having gained the wealth for which, inspired by love, he had toiled and fought, he had lost the thing which gave the gold its value. The thing for which he had wanted the gold had become impossible to him.

The light in the Cañon of Gold went out. The hours passed, and still the man held his place on that wild spot high up in the mountains.

And now he saw and felt the mysteries of the night—saw the wide sea of darkness that engulfed the vast desert below, and felt the whispering breath of the desert air—saw the mighty peaks and shoulders of the mountains lifting out of the dark shadows below, up and up and up into the star-lit sky, and felt the fragrant coolness dropping from the pines that held the snows—saw the night sky filled with countless star worlds, and felt the brooding Presence that fixes the time of their every movement, and

marks their paths of gleaming light—saw the black depths of the Cañon of Gold, and felt the ghostly multitude of the disappointed ones who had toiled there, as he had toiled, for the treasure they never found, or, finding, were cursed with its possession.

And then, as one who in a vision glimpses the underlying truth of things, this man, on the mountain heights above the Cañada del Oro, saw that life itself was but a Cañon of Gold.

As men through the ages had braved the dangers and endured the hardships of desert and mountains to gain the yellow wealth from the Cañada del Oro, so men braved dangers and endured hardships everywhere. Every dream of man was a dream of gold. Every effort was an effort for gold. Every hope was a hope for gold. For gold was life and honor and power and love and happiness. And gold was death and dishonor and murder and hatred and misery.

It was gold that had led Marta's father to purchase the rich mining property from the ignorant owners, for a price that was little more than nothing. The victims of George Clinton's shrewdness had stolen his child, in the hope that by her they might regain the gold they had lost. It was for gold that Clinton had robbed the people who, because of their need for gold, had trusted him with their savings. To insure himself in the possession of gold, Clinton had sent Donald Payne to prison and condemned him to a life of dishonor. Gold, to the escaped convict, had meant, at first, the bare necessities of life. It had come to mean everything for which a man desires to

live. For gold, Sonora Jack had given himself to crime. Lured by the gold of the Mine with the Iron Door he had come to the Cañada del Oro and had been brought, finally, to his death. It was gold that had, at last, led to the revelations that brought the love of Hugh Edwards and Marta to naught.

The man saw that the story of his life in the Cañon of Gold, with its needs, its hopes, its labor, its fears, its victories and defeats, was the story of all life, everywhere.

He saw that the need of gold is a curse—that the craving for gold is a greater curse—that the possession of gold may be the greatest curse of all.

When Hugh Edwards went down to the cabin he found Natachee the Indian waiting for him.

CHAPTER XXXIV

MORNING

"The heart of a white man is a strange thing—I, Natachee, cannot understand."

AND Hugh Edwards knew by the light that flashed in the Indian's somber eyes—by the expression of that dark countenance, and by the proud bearing of the red man, that Natachee had put aside the teaching of the white man's school. There was something, too, beneath the Indian's stoical composure which told Hugh that he was under the strain of some great excitement.

Gazing at Edwards with a curious intentness, the Indian said:

"My friend has been watching his star in the Cañon of Gold."

"Yes, Natachee, I have been up on the mountain."

Silently the Indian gave him a letter. It was from Marta.

Hugh handled the letter, turning it over and over, as if debating with himself what he should do with it.

"Open it and read," said the Indian, "then hear what I, Natachee, shall say."

Edwards opened the letter and read.

It was not a long letter, but it was filled with the strongest assurances of understanding and sympathy

that a woman's loving heart could pen. Saint Jimmy had told her of the completion of the story that had been left unfinished by the Mexican, and had explained its effect on the man she loved. But it made no difference to her, that she was proved to be the daughter of George Clinton, except that she was glad for her future husband's sake that her birth was honorable—that she was not nameless, as she had believed herself to be. For the rest, everything must go on exactly as if she were still the old prospectors' partnership girl. Saint Jimmy had gone to complete the arrangements he had started to make when Sonora Jack carried her away. There must be no change in their plans. When they were safe out of the country, she could communicate with her father. Hugh must come for her at once. She would be waiting for him to-morrow morning.

With deliberate care, Hugh Edwards folded the letter and returned it to the envelope.

The Indian was watching him intently.

The man did not appear in any way surprised, elated or disturbed. One would have said that he had been expecting the letter—had foreseen its contents, and had already, in his mind, answered it. His manner was that of one who, having fought and lived through the crisis of a storm, methodically and wearily takes up again the routine duties of his existence.

Calmly, with a shadowy smile that would have caused Marta to think of Saint Jimmy, he spoke.

"What is it that you wish to say, Natachee?"

"I, Natachee the Indian, can now pay the debt I owe Hugh Edwards."

"You have more than paid that debt, Natachee."

The red man returned haughtily:

"Is the life of Natachee of such little value that it is paid for by the death of that snake, Sonora Jack, and his companion who stopped the arrow?"

"But for you, Marta would not have escaped from Sonora Jack and the other outlaws," returned Edwards.

"But for me, no one would know the woman Hugh Edwards loves, except as the Pardners' girl. Hugh Edwards, but for Natachee, would be free to make her his wife."

Indicating the letter in his hand, Hugh answered:

"She says here that it need make no difference. She says for me to come, as if the Mexican had died without speaking, as if you had taken nothing from Sonora Jack."

The Indian's eyes blazed with triumph.

"Good! That is as I, Natachee, wanted it to be. Now the way of my friend to the great desire of his heart is clear. Listen! When you left so hurriedly, after hearing the name of the girl's father, Doctor Burton wondered at your manner. I told him that now, when the girl was known to be the daughter of a man of wealth and honorable position, you felt you could not take her for your wife."

"That was true enough," returned Edwards,

wondering at the excitement which the Indian, with all of his assumed composure, could not hide.

"Yes, but I did not tell any one that it was the girl's father who sent you, my friend, to prison. No one but Hugh Edwards and Natachee knows that. No one shall know until you, Donald Payne, are revenged for all that this man Clinton has made you suffer. When you have trapped this Clinton coyote—when you have made him pay for your shame—your imprisonment—your mother's death—when he has paid for everything your heart holds against him—then I, Natachee, will have paid my debt to you."

Hugh Edwards gazed at the Indian, bewildered, amazed, wondering.

"What on earth do you mean, Natachee?"

"Do you not understand? Listen."

"The girl, who does not know what her father did, will go with you. Good!—Take her. Let there be a pretense of marriage. Then, when her shame is accomplished, send her to her father. Let George Clinton, who made Donald Payne a convict, beg that convict to give his daughter a name for her children. The shame that he heaped upon your name—the dishonor that he compelled you to suffer—you will give back to him through his daughter."

The white man exclaimed with horror:

"In God's name stop!"

"Is not the heart of Donald Payne filled with hate for the man who has filled his life with suffering?"

"Yes, Natachee, I hate George Clinton."

"But you will not take the revenge that I, Natachee, have planned for you?"

"No—No—No!"

"The heart of a white man is a strange thing," returned the Indian. "I, Natachee, cannot understand."

The sun was not yet above the mountains, but the sky was glorious with the beauty of the new day, when Hugh Edwards stood in the doorway of the Indian's hut.

Against a sky of liquid gold, melting into the deeper blue above, wreaths of flaming crimson cloud mists were flung with the careless splendor of the Artist who paints with the brush of the wind and the colors of light on the canvas of the heavens. The man bared his head and, with face uplifted, watched.

He felt the soft breath of the spring on his cheek and caught the perfume of cedar and pine. He heard the birds singing among the blossoms on the mountain side. He saw the mighty peaks and crags towering high. He looked down upon the foothills and mesas and afar over the desert where gray-blue shadows drifted on a sea of color into the far purple distance. A squirrel, in a live oak near by, chattered a glad good morning. A buck stepped from the cover of a manzanita thicket and stood, for a moment, with antlered head lifted, as if he too sensed the beauty and the meaning of life. A timid doe came to stand beside her lordly mate. The man, motionless, held his breath. In a flash they were gone.

Natachee the Indian stood beside his white companion.

Hugh Edwards held out his hand to the red man.

"Good-by, Natachee."

"You go?" asked the puzzled Indian.

"Yes, you have paid your debt, Natachee."

The fire of savage exultation flamed in the red man's eyes.

"Hugh Edwards will take the revenge that I, Natachee, have offered?"

"No."

The Indian said doubtfully, as if striving for an answer to the thing which puzzled him so:

"There is something in the white man's heart that is more than hate?"

"Yes, Natachee. Yesterday I believed that there was nothing left for me in life but hate. Then you, last night, revealed to me what hate might do, and I knew the strength of love. I must go now—to the woman who is waiting for me, down there in the Cañon of Gold."

But Hugh Edwards, when he told Saint Jimmy that George Clinton was living, had been mistaken.

The very night that Natachee brought the girl from that place where Sonora Jack had taken her, Marta's father died in a Los Angeles hospital. In the same hour that the Indian and the girl were stealing from the Mexican house south of the border, the man for whose crime Donald Payne was sent to prison was dictating a confession. With the last of his strength, he signed the instrument.

Natachee, when he offered to Hugh Edwards his scheme of revenge, did not know that at that very moment every newspaper in the land was heralding the innocence of the escaped convict, Donald Payne. The man who went down the mountain slopes and ridges toward the Cañon of Gold that morning did not know that he was even then a free man. The girl who waited for her lover who had never spoken to her of his love did not know. But Doctor Burton, when he went to Oracle the evening before to complete his arrangements for that wedding journey, had received the news.

It was like Saint Jimmy to meet Hugh Edwards on the mountain side that morning, and to tell him what he had learned before Hugh had come within sight of the house in the cañon. It was like Saint Jimmy, too, to suggest that perhaps now Marta need never know, at least not until after they had returned from their trip abroad.

CHAPTER XXXV

FREEDOM

It was the plan that had been arranged by Saint Jimmy.

LATE in the afternoon of that appointed day, an automobile from Tucson turned off from the Bankhead Highway into the old road that leads to the Cañada del Oro.

At the point where the road enters the Cañon of Gold, which is as far as an automobile can go on that ancient trail, Hugh and Marta, with old Thad, were waiting.

The automobile would take them, without a stop, straight south through Tucson to Nogales, where they would cross the international boundary line into Nogales, Mexico. From there, immediately after the wedding ceremony, Donald Payne and his bride would travel by rail to Mexico City, from which point in due time they would go to the lands of the old world. Thad would return to the Cañada del Oro, and would, for a while at least, make his home with Saint Jimmy and Mother Burton.

It was the plan that had been arranged by Saint Jimmy when they all believed that it was unsafe for Hugh to make his real name known in the United States. For Marta's sake, the original plan was still

to be carried out. When Marta and her husband were safely out of the country and on their way abroad, Doctor Burton would give the facts to the newspapers. In a few months the sensational story would cease to be of news interest to the press and would be forgotten by the public. Then Marta would be told that her husband's innocence had been established—that Donald Payne, no longer a fugitive from prison, was free to return again to his own country.

Saint Jimmy and his mother had said their good-bys at the little home of the old prospectors and their partnership girl.

From a rocky point on Samaniego Ridge, high above the Cañon of Gold, Natachee the Indian saw the black moving spot which was the automobile on the old trail that had been followed by so many peoples, in so many ages.

Motionless, as a figure of stone, with a face unmoved, the red man watched.

The automobile stopped.

The dark eyes of the Indian, trained to such distance, could see, as no white man could have seen, the three figures entering the machine.

The automobile moved away, winding down through the foothills, crawling cautiously over the ridges, laboring heavily across the sandy washes, growing smaller and smaller until even to the Indian's vision it was lost in the gray-brown plain of the desert. But still Natachee's gaze held toward the south where presently he saw a faint cloud of

dust rising from the yellow threadlike line of highway. Then the cloud of dust melted into the desert air. A moment longer the Indian watched. Then slowly his gaze swept the many miles that lie between the foot of the Santa Catalinas and the far horizon.

A puff of air, fragrant with the scent of the desert, stirred the single feather that drooped from the loosely twisted folds of the Indian's headband. In the blue depth of the sky, a wheeling eagle screamed.

Lifting his dark face toward the mountain peaks that towered above his lonely hut, Natachee the Indian—mystic guardian of the Mine with the Iron Door—smiled.

(S)

THE END